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BIBLE STUDIES

**TESTED BIBLE STUDIES
FOR SMALL GROUPS
VOLUMES 1-5**

by Rev. John Matson

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INTRODUCTION

The Bible study lessons provided on *In The Master Christian Library* have been designed with the small group in mind. They were developed over a period of several years and tested in a number of small groups.

The following characteristics mark these lessons: they emphasize a personal relationship with God and caring for others; they are all Bible oriented; they are typically non-denominational in content. They are distributed with a liberal license for personal or small group use (i.e., you may alter them and/or make as many copies as you need for your ministry).

We have appreciated the many comments these Studies have received from Bible Study leaders around the world. It is gratifying to know that these simple lessons have been of help in growing the Christian life.

A previous edition of the Studies included a volume 6 that was actually a repeat of previously released lessons. We regret this error. We have included more than 1000 pages of Theology Notes (Derickson's Notes on Theology) in hope this will help provide useful study material.

AGES Software is negotiating to provide a complete set of high quality Bible Study lessons that take the student through the entire Bible verse by verse. Announcement will be made in late 1997. If you have a special interest in this kind of material, we would very much like to speak with you. Feel free to call our offices and ask for "Development."

Lesson A 1 - What is the Heart & Soul of the Church?

- A. Consider for a few moments what the early New Testament Church might have been like. List several characteristics that you think may have distinguished it from the Synagogue or other religious or social groups mentioned in the Bible:
- B. Read I John 1:1-4...
1. What types of evidence were presented to the disciples that convinced them about the nature and message of the Lord Jesus? (vs.1,2)
 2. What was the basic message that John and the other Disciples received from the Lord? (vs.2b)
 3. John had a strong emotional/spiritual response to the message of Jesus (vs.4). How do you think this emotion revealed itself in John's life, that is, what outward things would we have seen in him?
- C. Read Romans 14:13-19
1. In verse 17, Paul makes the Kingdom of God sound like it is very much at the heart of the Church. What is the Kingdom of God like according to this passage?
 2. According to this passage (vs.18,19), what do the Christian "do" in response to the fact that they are part of the Kingdom of God?
 3. Briefly describe what you think would be the sacrifice involved and the benefits given by God if the members of a church were wholly committed to see this passage (vs. 17-19) become a reality: Sacrifice Rewards/Benefits
- D. In the following passages, what are some of the ways in which the Holy Spirit ministers to believers? How does He help them and what does he help them to do?:

1. Ezekiel 36:27 (a prophecy concerning the work of the coming Holy Spirit)
2. Acts 1:8
3. I John 3:24
4. John 14:16,26
5. II Timothy 1:14

[Note: treasure = “testimony” (vs.8) “gospel” (vs.10), “sound words” (vs.13)]

- E. When the members of the New Testament Church wanted to get the full effects of the Holy Spirit's ministry in their life, what did they believe God for?:
1. Ephesians 5:18
 2. Galatians 5:13-17
- F. Summarize in your own words what we must do to appropriate the Holy Spirit's full effect in your life:
- G. Let's pray for the ministry of the Holy Spirit in our life, that it may come in all its fullness...

Lesson A 2 - Everyone Counts In The Church!

- A. Describe some of the feelings that occur when a person in a family or a Church feels like they do not have a meaningful place among the members:
- B. Do such feelings usually result in division?
- C. Read I Corinthians 12:12-17, 24b-27
1. What is the picture or analogy used by Paul to show us what the Church is like?:
 2. According to this passage, how important is each person in the Church?:
 3. How prominent or skilled must a person be in order to have a legitimately meaningful place in the Church?:
- D. Read Matthew 18:19,20
1. According to Jesus, what advantage is there to praying with someone--especially in a Church discipline situation (which is the context of this passage)?
 2. What do you think: does God listen to the prayers of an individual more than a group, or a group more than an individual? ___Yes ___No
 3. Offer your suggestions: Can you think of occasions when God would be seeking the prayer of each of the members of a group instead of the prayer of any one particular individual?

E. Read Romans 15:1-7, 13

1. According to this passage, what resources are available to the Christian to help do the work of ministering to others?
 - a) vs. 1
 - b) vs. 3
 - c) vs. 4
 - d) vs. 5
 - e) vs. 7
 - f) vs. 13
2. What are some of the things God has already equipped us to do in the Church, particularly for our neighbor?
3. According to verses 5-7, what are some of the things that God is looking for from the Church as a whole?
4. Does everyone in the Body need to participate in order for these commands to become a reality?

F. Is harmony in the Body of Christ something that is automatic? If not, what must be done by each of us to preserve it?

1. Ephesians 4:3
2. Philippians 1:27, 2:2

G. In light of our study, list some of the reasons the Lord needs each of us to function as part of the Church today:

H. Let's pray concerning one thing you could do this week that would help you to feel more a part of the Body of Christ...

Lesson A 3 - The Holy Spirit Belongs to Us!

- A. When non-Christians are asked about the person and work of the Holy Spirit, what kinds of things do you think they bring up?
- B. Read John 16:7,8,13-15
1. Describe the way that Lord Jesus prepared His disciples for His departure? Was this method effective?:
 2. How have some of the various translations rendered the name of the Holy Spirit given in verse 7?:
 3. What was the Holy Spirit going to do in the life of the believer?:
 4. How was the Holy Spirit going to prepare the world so that the believer would be able to do his work?:
- C. What seems to be the main reason the Holy Spirit was sent into the lives of the believer, as seen in the following Scriptures?:
1. Acts 4:31:
 2. Acts 11:22-24:
 3. Acts 13:9-12:
- D. Many believers seem afraid to share the good news about Jesus Christ. Based on the passages we looked at in question C. (above), do you think the phrase “filled with the Spirit” might have something to do with courage to share the Gospel?
- E. Consider for a moment: What would happen to the ministry of the Holy Spirit in the life of a believer if he did not use the Spirit's power for testifying of the Gospel?
- F. The ministry of the Holy Spirit touches the lives of the believer in many ways, all of which prepares us for the work that God has in mind for us. Briefly describe His work as seen in the following passages:

1. Rom.8:14
 2. Rom.8:16
 3. Rom.8:26
 4. Rom.5:3-5
- G. What characterizes the person who pretends to be a believer, but who is actually without the Spirit of God? (Jude 19)
- H. How can we be sure we are “filled with the Spirit”? (Eph. 5:18):
- I. Let's write down the name of one person for whom we might pray that God would open a door in their life. Pray that you might use a filling with the Spirit in order to share the Gospel with that person...

Lesson A 4 - Building a Relationship With The Spirit

- A. Have several in your group describe the work the Holy Spirit did in bringing them into a relationship with Jesus Christ:
- B. Read John 3:1-8. The Holy Spirit plays a very important role in the spiritual birth of man, a transformation Jesus calls “being born again”. See if you can identify that role by working through the following questions:

1. Who was Nicodemus and what would you guess would be his level of Scripture knowledge? (vs.1,2; see also John 3:10)
2. What do you suppose would be his understanding of who Jesus was? (vs.2a)
3. Jesus answers Nicodemus even before he can ask the question he brought with him. Can you figure out, based on the Lord's answer, the question Nicodemus brought?:
4. With what did Nicodemus quite naturally confuse spiritual birth? How does Jesus explain* the difference between the two? (vs. 4)

(*We would understand the words “born of water” as referring to physical birth, the placenta bursting)

5. In what ways would the physical birth process (being born the first time) compare with the spiritual birth process (being born again)?
 - a) How many individuals are involved at the start? Who are they?
 - (1) Physical Birth...
 - (2) Spiritual Birth...
 - b) How visible are the early stages of development?
 - (1) Physical Birth...

(2) Spiritual Birth...

c) What happens when the process is complete?

(1) Physical Birth...

(2) Spiritual Birth...

C. Read I John 3:9,10.

1. What kind of children result from a person being born of the Spirit? To whom are they related?
2. When a person is born of the Spirit, what remains within that person?
3. Based on the picture we have here in this passage, would it be reasonable to expect that we could get ride of this “seed”?

D. Read I Corinthians 6:15-17. When our spirit gets together with God's Spirit (when we are born again), what happens to these two spirits within us?:

E. Read John 16:7,8 and Titus 3:5,6: What does the Holy Spirit actually do to prepare us for being born again believers?:

F. Consider carefully the following statement: “The Holy Spirit goes ahead and prepares the heart of every individual to whom a Gospel presentation is made. Not all respond, but all are prepared.” Do you agree or disagree?

G. Identify one unbelieving person in whose life the Spirit is working, and bring them before the Lord in prayer...

Lesson A 5 - The Church Comes Alive!

- A. The fellowship of Christians has been a positive experience for many people over the centuries. Take a moment and share with the group one of the most encouraging things that has happened to you as a Church attender:
- B. During the early days, just after it began, what were some of the things that the Holy Spirit did to build and nourish the Church? List the characteristics after each passage:
1. Revelations 2:7 (also 11, 29)
 2. Hebrews 2:1-4
 3. I Thessalonians 1:5,6
 4. Colossians 1:8
 5. Ephesians 4:3
 6. Ephesians 2:18-22
 7. Romans 14:17
 8. Romans 8:26,27
 9. Romans 5:5
 10. Acts 20:28
 11. Acts 16:6-9
- C. In light of our study on the ministry of the Holy Spirit to the Church in the previous question, discuss what the Church would be like if the Spirit were somehow hindered from doing its work?:
- D. From your memory about the New Testament Church in the Scriptures, describe some of the things that were taking place that were encouraging a sense of “awe” and nurturing a feeling of “joy and gladness” among the people (as in Acts 2:46):

- E. Read III John 4 and I Thessalonians 2:19. What kinds of things would bring a similar sense of joy into the modern Church?
- F. In the discussion time before our closing prayer today, take a few minutes and ask: “Lord, point out to me how I might bring greater joy to my Church through YOU.”
- G. If you can, share with your group what the Lord might have said on this matter through our lesson today...

Lesson A 6 - Walk By The Spirit and LIVE!

- A. The physical act of walking, when evaluated by a trained observer, tells much about the condition, characteristics and even the character of the observed. In your group list some of the things you can tell about a person from their physical walk: [Note: Don't forget to include PROGRESS, ZEAL, DETERMINATION , etc.]
- B. Read Genesis 5:22 and 6:9. From the ancient days, the term WALKED was used to describe more than traveling on foot. Based on the passages you have just read and using your own words, describe the activity mentioned:
- C. In the following passages we are told some of the ways we are not supposed to WALK. See if you can attach a practical or contemporary understanding to each of them [Note that some translations use the word CONDUCT or LIVE instead of the actual word WALK in the following]:
1. I John 1:6
 2. I John 2:11
 3. I Corinthians 3:3
 4. II Corinthians 4:2
 5. Ephesians 2:2
 6. Ephesians 4:17-20
 7. II Thessalonians 3:11
- D. In the following, we are given some ways that we are supposed to walk. Attempt once again to attach a practical or contemporary understanding to each of them:
1. Ephesians 5:5-10
 2. Romans 6:4

3. Romans 14:15
 4. Eph.4:1 & Col.1:10
 5. II Corinthians 5:7
 6. Philippians 3:17
 7. Colossians 4:5
- E. Think rather carefully about this one, it's a bit tricky: According to II Corinthians 10:2 and 10:3 there is a walk related to the flesh which is appropriate and one which is not. What are these two walks and how do they differ?
- F. Discuss in your group: With all of these types of WALKS that we are expected to walk (or not walk), how is the believer supposed to be able to live at that standard?
- G. With your group...
- share one area of walking mentioned above that you can believe God for in the coming week (i.e., where will He be helping you -- with your cooperation and faith -- during the coming week?]

Lesson A 7 - Let Us Be Of ONE Spirit!

- A. During the next few minutes, give some examples of the various ways our culture encourages divisions, disputes, and negative divisive types of competition:
- B. What are some the things you like best about unity* when you experience it in your home, business or church?
- C. What do you think: Is it man's natural inclination to practice unity? Why or why not? :
- D. Read I Corinthians 1:10.
1. List the several exhortations Paul gives in this passage.
 2. Given the strength of the statements made in this passage, do you think Paul actually believes the Corinthians can carry them out? Why or why not?
- E. Read Philippians 2:2, Ephesians 4:1-6 and Colossians 3:12-15. Based on your reading, see if you can suggest an answer to each of the following:
1. Is unity something that just “happens”, or is there some human effort involved in receiving it?
 2. Once unity is acquired, is there anything that ought to be done to maintain it? If so, what would that be?
 3. What role does the Holy Spirit seem to play in the preservation of unity in the Church?
- F. Read Romans 16:17-20. This brief paragraph gives us some clues about the nature and practice of unity in the Church:
1. What are we to watch out for and what do we do with it when we spot it?
 2. What is the role of the Lord Jesus Christ in the preservation of unity?

3. How important is staying with the teachings of the Bible in the endeavor to preserve unity?
- G. What do you think is the greatest threat to the unity of the church today?
- H. With your group...
1. Share one insight that the Holy Spirit has spoken to you about concerning the subject of unity... or
 2. Share one area in which the Holy Spirit is saying to you, "Here is how you can help Me maintain unity in the Body...!"

[Definition: **Unity** is the state of mind and heart in which two or more people experience a common purpose and work together by a common set of principles toward the same basic goals. The presence of unity does not presume or even require some level of uniformity. It does, however, require harmony -- in much the same manner as the singers in a choir all sing but not the same notes]

Lesson B-1 The Healing Power Of The Tongue

1. A friend comes to you and tells of a report they heard about you being spread among others. The report is untrue, but is still being spread. What are some of the things you might want to do? What do most of us usually do?:

2. What is it about rumors, gossip, and the like, that makes them so painful when we are their victims?:
 - Why do you think we seem to enjoy them so much (when we hear them) when they are about others instead of us?

3. Proverbs 18:21. According to the Bible, just how important are the words we speak?:

4. In the following verses from the book of Proverbs are some of the GOOD things that words can be used to accomplish. See if you can identify at least one GOOD thing in each passage:
 - 12:14
 - 15:23
 - 24:(24)25
 - 15:1(a)

5. Again from the book of Proverbs: see if you can identify at least one EVIL thing that words can be used to accomplish:
 - 16:28
 - 15:4(b)

- 11:9(a)

- 13:3

6. Read Proverbs 26:24-28. What are at least three things that eventually happens to a person who misuses words?:

v.26b v.27 v.28

7. Read Proverbs 16:24. What can happen to the person who commits their mouth to speaking only GOOD words?:

8. This week's focus on care and prayer...

In your work place, neighborhood, home, church, or just on the phone, you will be tempted to use evil speech instead of the wonderful healing power of good speech.

In your group, talk about a commitment for one week, for using words that build up and heal **only**.

If you feel you can, share the area of greatest temptation as the focus of prayer. (EVERYONE SUFFERS FROM THIS PROBLEM, SO... Don't try to tackle all of the areas at once -- you'll fail for sure. Just try to get a good start at one place.)

Lesson B-2 Discovering True Acceptance

1. One of the strongest needs found in every person regardless of their circumstance is the need to be accepted -- loved for who he or she is. When a person does not receive this acceptance, what can -- and usually does -- happen to their emotions and ability to relate to others?:
2. Acceptance is communicated by more than the words we speak. What are some of the things that others do that communicate acceptance to you, personally?:
3. Does God accept people just the way they are? How do we know? Have you experienced this acceptance personally?:
4. In the following list of passages are some examples of the kinds of things that God does to provide for and demonstrate His acceptance of us in Christ. See if you can identify the thing(s) which He does to communicate his acceptance and list them at the right:
 - Colossians 1:21,22
 - II Corinthians 5:21
 - Psalm 103:10-12
 - John 14:12 • Isaiah 40:31
 - Isaiah 41:10
 - Psalm 34:7
 - John 10:29 • I Peter 2:24

5. In light of the passages that we have just read, give your opinion as to why some people do not feel accepted by God and fail to -- even dread the very thought -- of coming to God in prayer?

6. Read I Corinthians 6:9-11. What process does God use to remove any of the barriers regarding His acceptance of us or our acceptance of each other in this world?

7. If we were not feeling accepted -- loved and received for who we are -- at any time in our life, what would be a good 'first thing' for us to do? How often might we find ourselves do this kind of activity?

8. This week's focus on care and prayer...

Do you feel accepted by God? Do you feel close to Him -- as close as you have at the best moment between you in the past?

If yes? You are UNIQUE! Praise God! Spend some time thanking Him for your wonderful state!

If not (and that is most of us) take a moment and privately, or with your group, confess to Him, let Him cleanse you, and receive His forgiveness.

Lesson B-3 Learning To Use HIS Authority

1. Describe some of your thoughts and feelings when: you are given responsibility to head a project and those working with you do not respond to or respect your leadership:

2. Do you think God has these same kinds of responses when humans fail to respond to His authority and leadership?

3. In your estimation, what is the most difficult thing about being a leader?

4. Read Daniel 2:21 and Romans 13:1. From where do rulers obtain their authority to rule?
 - Is this true of secular rulers as well?

5. Read Titus 3:1 and I Peter 2:13,14. Why is it so important for us to have leaders and rulers over us?
 - What happens when we don't have them?

 - At what level of leadership do you think we can stop respecting our leaders; do we just respect important or significant leaders?

6. Why do you think God has reserved for Himself the responsibility of selecting the leaders we have?

7. Read Isaiah 10:1, Ezekiel 45:9, and Hosea 5:10. Is the Lord interested in the fate of unrighteous leaders in this age -- or just in the age to come? What does He promise to do to wicked leaders?

8. Read Proverbs 20:28; 25:4,5; 28:2. Do leaders need our help to rule and rule well? In what way?

9. This week's focus on care and prayer...

Is there a leader that you are having a struggle with -- either someone near or someone far away?

Have you given thought as to how you might help them or improve their relationship with you?

Spend a few moments and share your concerns with your group and then take the matter to the Lord with as much openness as you are able to muster.

Lesson B-4 Dealing With My Anger

1. Anger is a very visible **emotion** and **moral attitude** in our day. Describe some of the more frequent ways people experience or express their anger:
2. The Bible has much to say about the anger and the wrath of God. Does it bother you that God gets angry? Why or why not?:
3. When God gets angry, does He "blow his top" (as we sometimes say about humans when they express anger quickly and vigorously)? How does He experience and express His anger?
4. Read Ephesians 4:26,27,31,32. In light of these passages and the issue in the previous question, what kind of limits do you think God has put on the anger of man? What can we do, what shouldn't we do?:
5. Read James 1:19,20. What is the major weakness with anger that springs from human hearts?:
6. In the following list of passages are some cautions about anger. Identify the activity that protects us from the dangers of anger:
 - Ecclesiastes 7:9
 - Ecclesiastes 10:4
 - Proverbs 29:8
 - Proverbs 22:24,25

- Proverbs 19:11

7. Do you think it is possible for someone to be angry in an unrighteous way and no one know about it? How?
8. In light of our study thus far, what is one area that you feel you need the most help from concerning the control of anger? (Only those that really want to should share on this one.)
9. This week's focus on care and prayer...

Is there an area of anger in your life that God does not have reign and rule over? Can you share it with your prayer partner? Can you ask the Holy Spirit to take charge of it?

If not, are you willing to let the Lord do a searching inventory on the subject in your life? Can you ask Him to do it beginning soon? Today?

WORDS THAT DESCRIBE THE VARIOUS FACES OF ANGER:

Anger In The Old Testament:

There are many diverse and colorful words that are used to describe this important characteristic. It is associated with physical characteristics like "inner burning", the "flaring or snorting of the nostrils". It is also seen in relationships such as a "pouring out of emotion" or a "violent outburst". The third class of words are related to pictures of what wrath does: "to refine or smelt", "to thresh, winnow or tread out", or "to demolish".

The important lesson is this: "The OT words for anger do not tell us whether anger is right or wrong, nor do they explain the anger of God. They simply tell us that anger exists." Anger is morally

neutral: the moral aspects are related to how it is used. *Expository Dictionary of Bible Words*, Richardson

In The New Testament:

There are basically two words for anger and wrath here: ORGÉ, "excited", which speaks often of the wrath of God; THYMOS, "smoke", meaning a conscious or deliberate act of expressing anger and is sometimes found in passages where anger is condemned (see Gal.5:20).

An Important Thought: Anger is a part of our nature -- and of our Lord. The proper use of anger is a learned behavior. Without discipline and these learned skills, anger toward others or ourselves is so potentially destructive it can -- and usually does -- result in the worst sort of evil.

Lesson B-5 Caring Is The Remedy!

1. In the English language, the word "care" has two rather distinct general uses. One use is rather negative and the other quite positive. What are these two meanings and -- in your opinion -- how did the word end up with such different meanings?:

2. Read John 13:34,35. When the Bible speaks of caring, just how important is it and what happens when it is absent in the church?:

3. Read I Corinthians 12:21-26, especially verse 25. (Read from an NASB version, if possible.)
 - Describe the role of caring that is to take place in the church (and by implication, outside the church). Who is to be cared for? What kind of caring is to take place?

 - What do you think would happen to the church that put that kind of caring into place on a regular basis?:

 - Explore some of the possible ways that a Growth Group might express and experience some of this type of caring:

4. Caring does not always take a form that we immediately appreciate. In the following passages identify the unique, important, yet sometimes painful forms of caring described:
 - Proverbs 3:11,12

 - Proverbs 9:8

- Proverbs 27:6
 - Proverbs 13:24
5. Read I Thessalonians 2:5-12. See how many different ways of caring you can identify in Paul's description of his ministry team's work in Thessalonica:

 6. Read I Peter 5:7 and Luke 10:40-42(NIV).
 - We have freedom from the "cares of caring" according to the first passage. Why? How does it work in our lives?

 - In light of our study, what important truth had Martha forgotten to apply that caused her anxiety?

 7. This week's focus on care and prayer...

How is the caring ministry in your life? Does caring sound like too much work? Are you too busy to be involved with real caring? If not, what might be missing?

In your group, ask the Lord to give you the special strength and blessing that is a part of sharing and caring as described in the Bible. Is there someone in particular that the Lord has said: "Please show some care toward..."

Are you looking for the blessing?

Lesson B-6 It Pays to Plan God's Way

1. Planning a project, an activity, an outing: describe how you feel about the subject of planning. Is it enjoyable, difficult, troublesome, distracting, fun...?:

2. There are many people that have difficulty planning the events and activities of their lives. Even Christians sometimes have acquired the reputation of being poor planners. Why do you think people fail to plan?:

3. Read James 4:13-17.
 - In your understanding, what is the sin that James is condemning in verses 13, 14 and 16?

 - According to verse 15, do you think he is forbidding the practice of planning? Why or why not?:

 - According to verse 17, what do we end up inadvertently doing in a situation in which we fail to plan?

4. Based on your experience with God and the Bible, does God plan His work and His activities? How do you know this?
 - Does His planning get in the way of His creativity, His caring, or His joy? Explain:

5. According to the following passages, what are some of the things we must include if we are to have successful experiences at planning?:
- Proverbs 20:18

 - Proverbs 24:6

 - Proverbs 16:3

 - Proverbs 20:5
6. According to Luke 14:26-30, what happens to the Christian if they fail to plan with reference to his spiritual walk with God?:
7. In your group, share some of the spiritual areas that might require planning if the goal the Lord has for us is to be reached:
8. This week's focus on care and prayer...

Are you working on some goal that is a struggle for you at this time? Is practical planning standing in your way? Do you find it hard to plan things out as the Bible suggests? Is there someone that you know of that could help you to become a better planner? Would a class, book, or seminar help? Would you ask the Lord to give you some guidance in taking the first step in becoming a better planner?

Is there a spiritual goal that the Lord has impressed upon you but which is not being realized because of inadequate planning? If you can

share this concern in your group, please do so and make it the object of your prayer this week.

If there is no struggle here, Praise the Lord! Thank Him for His blessing!

About the Words In The Bible for Planning:

The words for to counsel, a counselor, to advise, an advisor, to devise something (as to invent), to skillfully put something together (as an artist would paint a picture), to plan, to prepare (as for a battle), to put together a strategy -- all these concepts come from the same basic root word in the language in which the Bible was originally written (that is, Hebrew).

Lesson C-1 The Struggle For The Faith

1. As an athlete is preparing himself for a contest, what kind of goals help him to prepare for the race properly and effectively? In other words, what should he focus his thoughts on if he hopes to really win?:

2. Read I Corinthians 9:24-27, II Timothy 4:7,8, and Ephesians 6:12.
 - As Paul struggles to win the contest that God has put him in, in reality against whom is he struggling?
 - Why do you think that Paul almost never mentions human enemies when he talks about struggling for the faith, although there are almost always humans involved in his struggle?:
 - In your understanding, what is the difference between struggling for the faith and struggling against someone who differs with us in our beliefs?:
 - What kind of effort did Paul give out in his effort for the faith? How much did he sacrifice?:
 - If Paul were here today visiting our Growth Group, what kind of activity and effort do you think he would ask from us in our struggle for/contention for the faith?:

3. Read Jude 3, 4 and 19-23. Jude talks about some of the practical aspects of struggling for the faith...
 - What kind of problem does the church face in its struggle for the faith?:

- According to verses 22 and 23, what are we supposed to do with these people so far as it depends on us?:
 - What very important principles must always be kept in mind if there is to be victory (according to verse 20 and 21):
4. Looking at Jude 1, what minimum preparation is needed for someone seeking to ready themselves for the inevitable struggle for the faith?:
 5. Neither Paul nor Jude ever seem to complain about the struggle for the faith. Why do you suppose they speak so optimistically and so positively about something that seems to give some a reason to be fearful?
 6. This week's focus on care and prayer...

Afraid to enter the struggle for the faith? Could it be that you might be struggling against someone instead of for someone?

Does the struggle FOR the faith seem hard, and difficult? Is there some preparation needed on your part to more effectively contest for the prize?

Are you willing to enter into the battle? Remember, there is a great prize waiting for you at the end!

Will you pray to that end with your group? If it is not the right time for you, will you ask Him to show you the next step?

Lesson C-2 The Unbelief Trap

1. Lack of Faith: everyone struggles with the problem of lack of faith at one time or another. Describe some of the things that go through your mind when you can't seem to find adequate faith:

2. According to the scriptures, where does faith come from? Where do we go to get it when we need it? Or, do we just have it?

[Note: What is meant by "faith" needs to be made clear: Faith is "a personal confidence in God." There are at least two ways that it can be seen in our world: faith which causes a person to become a Christian -- also called SAVING faith, and the faith that enables us to follow God and do what he asks -- also called SERVING faith. SAVING faith gets us into the family of God, SERVING faith enables us to overcome the obstacles on the road of life.]

- Read Ephesians 2:8,9. Where does SAVING faith come from?

- Read Luke 17:1-5. Where did the disciples think SERVING faith came from?

- Read John 14:11-14. What is the result of the SERVING faith that has been given to those who follow Christ?

[Note: In the following section, we will examine some of the sources of lack of "serving faith" and explore some of the alternatives.]

3. According to each of the following passages, what forces work to hinder the faith of the person desiring to serve Jesus Christ?:
 - Matthew 24:9-12
 - Ephesians 6:12, 16
 - II Timothy 4:10
 - Hebrews 2:1-3a
 - Hebrews 10:22-25

4. In seeking to increase the amount of "serving faith" that a Christian might have available, the Bible tells us that there are two very important things we must remember about the nature of this faith:
 - Luke 17:5,6
 - Hebrews 11:32-34

5. In light of the study we have just shared together, what are some of the ways we might increase our "serving faith" before the Lord? What action steps might we take to see this faith realized in this life?

6. This week's focus on care and prayer...

Is your faith smaller than you would like it to be? Are you afraid to use it because it might fail? Have you grown weary from trying to do the right thing without using serving faith?

If you feel free to do it, take a few moments to share with your group your need in this area. Ask the Lord to help you use the faith you have that it might grow. Remember, even tiny mustard seed faith can do many wonderful things!

Lesson C-3 Who Is In Charge of Your Life?

1. There are many voices in our world calling out for the position of "boss" of our life. Some of these voices are obvious, even blatant. Others are hidden and not very obvious at all. In your group, see how many different kinds of "bosses" you can come up with -- especially some of the hidden ones:

2. The word "Lord" means different things to different people. For some it is a negative thing, for others it has a very positive and constructive meaning. When you see the word used in the Bible or see it associated with Jesus Christ, what does it mean to you -- personally?:

3. When the Bible speaks directly or indirectly about Lordship of Jesus, what are some of the things it is referring to?:
 - Revelation 5:12
 - Matthew 28:18
 - Philippians 2:10
 - Romans 14:9
 - John 20:26-29
 - I Corinthians 11:27
 - Acts 7:59,60

4. Read I Corinthians 15:27,28. What is to be the future for the "Lordship of Christ"? Will it last? Will it eventually win out over the various alternatives to His lordship?

5. What happens when a person says "no" to the "Lordship of Christ" -- are they able to have absolute lordship over their own personal life? What do you think: if we don't submit to the Lord Jesus, do we eventually end up having to submit to some other Lord, such as our lower nature? Look for evidence one way or the other in the following passages:

- Psalm 81:8-16

- Ephesians 4:17-19

- Romans 1:21

6. Based on the above study, do you believe that it is God's desire that we serve Jesus Christ as our Lord? Why? What reasons does the Bible give for this? Does it benefit man to do so?

7. This week's focus on care and prayer...

Is Jesus your Lord? Have you asked Him to be your Lord? Is it something you have asked Him to do but might have taken back at some time in the past -- even recent past?

Would you be willing to say "Yes" to Him again?

Do you think He would want you to say yes?

If you wish to do so, share your "Yes" with your group.

If your answer is "No" for right now, consider asking Him to help make your "no" a "yes".

Lesson C-4 What It Takes To Build A Strong Christian

1. We have all met individuals that we felt were strong Christians; these were people we admired because they seem to carry with them a little of God himself. Even some who do not profess to be Christians are able to identify "real" or godly Christians. List some of the qualities you have noticed in such strong and growing Christians:

2. What do you think: The people who act like strong Christians, are they born with these qualities, or do they somehow "earn" the right to them from God, or are they trained to act that way, or do they simply experience a miracle that automatically makes them that way when they become Christians?:

3. In the following passages, what does the Bible say accounts for the spirit strength and dynamic faith of growing Christians?:
 - Acts 20:32

 - I Peter 2:1-3

 - Ephesians 4:11-16

 - II Peter 3:17,18

 - Job 17:9

- Hebrews 6:1

- I Thessalonians 3:9,10

4. Consider the examples of growing spiritual strength and faith in each of the following. What things do you think were going on in their lives that explain why they were growing:

For each of the following verses answer...

Who is growing? What is the evidence of their growth?

- Luke 1:80

- Luke 2:40

- II Thes. 1:3

5. Read Ephesians 3:17-19. What is the role of love (i.e., agapé love, the love that flows from God, love that has no limits or conditions) to the whole process of becoming stronger Christians?
6. Read I John 2:27-29 (NIV). What is the role of the filling of God's presence (i.e., the filling of His Spirit or the abiding presence of Christ within a person) in the life of the growing, strong Christian?

7. This week's focus on care and prayer...

Most Christians want to grow and become stronger in their faith and commitment. Many struggle with becoming strong because they don't know how, or they feel guilty about past failures, or they are afraid of what it might cost them (such as certain pleasures, friendships, leisure time, etc.) or they feel too weak to even start.

Everyone has felt one of these pressures at one time or another. Can you identify a pressure that hinders your growth? Can you share it with your group? (These things are rather personal so don't get unnerved if you can't share at this time.)

Consider some of the things that the Lord might be saying to you about growing. Would you say "Yes" to growth -- even if it may seem difficult?

Is He speaking to you about one of the areas we have studied in this lesson as a starting point? Would you be willing to say "Yes" to this area?

Lesson C-5 God Is Always Willing And Able

1. Friendship is a wonderful thing, something we all need if we are to prosper in this life (as Daniel Defoe's story of the lonely Robinson Crusoe so clearly illustrates). Describe some of the responses you have seen or experienced when a friend decides to stop being a friend; describe the experience of being abandoned:

2. What kind of attitude toward maintaining personal relationships was demonstrated by the Lord Jesus while He was here on earth?:
 - John 15:15
 - John 14:18
 - John 13:1

3. What kind of attitude toward relationships is expressed and/or demon- stated by our Heavenly Father?:
 - Deuteronomy 4:31
 - Joshua 1:5
 - Isaiah 54:10

4. Read Deuteronomy 7:9, Psalm 89:1, and Hebrews 6:18.
 - Does God keep His word about His promises?

 - For how long a period of time does he keep His promises?

 - Toward whom does he refuse to make promises of blessings in the first place?

5. Read Matthew 28:20, Hebrews 6:18 and 13:5. Based on the record in the scriptures we have studied thus far, if Jesus came into the life of a person, would he ever leave that person?

6. What happens to us when we start to doubt the existence of our relationship with God? Do you think that God wants people to have doubts about their relationship with Him?

7. When we come to the point where we begin doubting that God cares about us or is for us, what action can we take to end that doubt?

8. This week's focus on care and prayer...

Does God love you? Are you sure about it? Have you thanked Him for His love -- recently?

Do you experience God's love on a regular basis, or does He seem far away and uncaring? Many people have that kind of experience. Sometimes it is lack of communication, sometimes it is offenses that have built up, sometimes it is a misunderstanding. The fact is, God loves you and always will, no matter what may have happened between you. He wants you to renew that relationship and experience His love afresh.

The Bible says: "While we were yet sinners, Christ DIED for us." Do you think that His love and acceptance is any less today? No, of course not. With your group, take another step in His love -- whatever level you may be at this day.

Lesson D-1 A Faith That Really Works

1. Describe a time when you had a faith that worked. It may have been a special event like a life threatening encounter in which you were rescued or a parking place on a rainy afternoon. Tell us about what you did to put faith to work:

- How faith worked for you:

- What you did to put faith to work:

2. See if you can as a group come up with some words and phrases that describe and define faith. How does it relate to :

- John 15:15

- John 14:18

- John 13:1

3. Read Mark 11:20-24. How many time is "saying" or "speaking" referred to in verses 23 &24? What is the role of actually speaking out the things we expect from God so far as putting faith to work is concerned?:

4. Read Romans 4:13-17 in at least two versions. The Living Paraphrase renders the second half of verse 17 with:

"...God will accept all people in every nation who trust God as Abraham did. And this promise is from God Himself, who makes the dead live again and speaks of future events with as much certainty as though they were already past."

- How does the Lord Himself deal with the issue of faith? Does He speak in an uncertain or doubting way about the things he wants us to have faith in, or does he speak with full assurance? Why?
5. Read John 20:26-29. How important is the role of having confidence in an as yet unseen thing to the presence of a faith that works? In other words, must we "see" something that is not in order to have genuine faith?
6. What kinds of things should we expect to receive by faith if we actually say we trust [believe, have faith] in God for?
- Philipians 4:13
 - Ephesians 3:20
 - I Peter 2:21

7. This week's focus on care and prayer...

OBSERVATION: Most of us feel that we have very weak faith. But Jesus said that even the smallest portion of the right faith is enough to unlock the door to the promises of God! The RIGHT faith? We might call genuine faith as "Say-it" faith; speaking of the promises of God as if they were actually true for us personally, and then relying on that promise.

FOCUS: With your group, talk about some of the different kinds of faith you experienced. Do you have "Say-it" faith? If you have the

freedom to do so, share one area in which you are seeking to exercise genuine faith.

Lesson D-2 How Big Is Our God?

1. There are many reasons why we do not put our trust in God on a daily basis. The reasons are very similar to why we did not put our trust in God at the start when we first heard about Him. What are some of the basic reasons why people don't believe in or trust in God?:
2. Read Isaiah 45:7-11 and 29:15,16. Concerning the complaint that God does not do things the WAY that we would like Him to do them, does He have the RIGHT to do things as He sees fit?:
 - Does He understand enough to know how to do the things He does in the best possible way?

Explain:

3. Does God care about doing what is best and right and good, or does he act in an arbitrary, thoughtless or careless fashion concerning His creation? In the following passages, identify God's attitude toward us His creation:
 - Isaiah 46:4
 - Psalm 31:23
 - Psalm 37:23-25
 - Matthew 10:28-31
 - Isaiah 25:4,5

4. Based on our study give some of the reasons why we might easily overlook the good in the difficult things that God is doing:

5. This week's focus on care and prayer...

With your group, discuss some possible areas in your life where you might be having a struggle trusting the Lord. Give some time to looking at that area with the idea that God wants the best for you there and will provide it with your cooperation. If you can, turn that area over to Him afresh in prayer.

Lesson D-3 How Big Is Our God?

1. The Bible says that the return of Jesus Christ is "at hand" and "imminent" [i.e., could come at **any** moment]. Let us suppose that Jesus arrived within the next hour. What sort of reaction do you suppose your friends and neighbors would have to such an event? What might they do?:

2. Describe the **importance** of the Second Coming as it is explained in the Bible (it is discussed in more than 530 verses):

3. What does the Bible say the world will be like when the Second Coming of Christ takes place?:
 - Matthew 24:37-39
 - Luke 17:28-30
 - Psalm 37:23-25

4. What kind of preparations are in order if the Master is coming back at a time that no one knows?:
 - Mark 13:32-37
 - I Corinthians 1:7
 - I Corinthians 4:5
 - I Thessalonians 5:23
 - Titus 2:11-13
 - I John 2:28

5. Which is more important: to know about the signs and doctrine of the Second Coming (i.e. to understand the important theological implications and teachings regarding it) or to be sufficiently prepared for it --personally -- when it comes? Why?:

6. What preparations are the most difficult for people of this age to make in order to be ready for the second coming of Christ?

7. This week's focus on care and prayer...

With your group, discuss some possible areas in your life where you might be having a struggle trusting the Lord. Give some time to looking at that area with the idea that God wants the best for you there and will provide it with your cooperation. If you can, turn that area over to Him afresh in prayer.

Lesson D-3 The How & Why of Being Ready For Jesus

1. The Bible says that the return of Jesus Christ is "at hand" and "imminent" [i.e., could come at **any** moment]. Let us suppose that Jesus arrived within the next hour. What sort of reaction do you suppose your friends and neighbors would have to such an event? What might they do?:

2. Describe the **importance** of the Second Coming as it is explained in the Bible (it is discussed in more than 530 verses):

3. What does the Bible say the world will be like when the Second Coming of Christ takes place?:
 - Matthew 24:37-39
 - Luke 17:28-30
 - Psalm 37:23-25

4. What kind of preparations are in order if the Master is coming back at a time that no one knows?:
 - Mark 13:32-37
 - I Corinthians 1:7
 - I Corinthians 4:5
 - I Thessalonians 5:23
 - Titus 2:11-13
 - I John 2:28

5. Which is more important: to know about the signs and doctrine of the Second Coming (i.e. to understand the important theological

implications and teachings regarding it) or to be sufficiently prepared for it --personally -- when it comes? Why?:

6. What preparations are the most difficult for people of this age to make in order to be ready for the Second Coming of Christ?

7. This week's focus on care and prayer...

Are you ready for the Second Coming of Christ -- *personally*? This is a very personal question, yet one that will influence many aspects of day to day living.

Perhaps one way to look at it in a positive way might be to ask: "What things am I doing right that I should keep on doing and would be proud of (in the good sense) if Jesus came today? Are there some things that I would like to add to that category?"

With your group, talk over some of the things you might want to add to that list. Ask God to help you.

Lesson D-4 The God Who Shares His Patience

1. Talk about a time when you "lost your patience." (Pick an incident about something relatively simple.) What is it that you "lost"? Can you describe it?:

2. The English word *patience* does not always appear in the Bible passages where the patience of God is described. What English words are used by modern translators to explain the Hebrew and Greek words for the Lord's patience?:
 - Nahum 1:3
 - Jeremiah 15:15 (NIV)
 - Acts 13:17,18 (NIV)
3. In your group, see if you can discover at least one way that the Lord demonstrated patience within the context of the following situations:
 - With the world population before the flood
 - With Moses and the Israelites in the desert
 - With the Jews while Jesus was being crucified
4. Read I Peter 2:18-23. If we receive some pressure, tribulation or distress that we do not deserve, do we have the right to react strongly to it -- especially in a negative way?:

- What did Jesus do under similar circumstances?
- What can a person do to respond well to unjust treatment?

5. Read Galatians 5:22,23, Romans 5:3-5 and James 1:2. Where does Godly patience come from?:

- From what you have learned from this and the other passages studied, how might one go about acquiring true patience?

6. This week's focus on care and prayer...

Sometimes we are ready to say "Lord I need patience -- and I want it right NOW!" We laugh at the humor but it reveals that we are all at least a little afraid to ask for patience fearing that it can only come through problems.

Perhaps its time we stopped seeing them as problems and calling them as they really are: opportunities.

Is there an opportunity in your life right now that needs a good dose of patience? Have you shared your situation with a prayer partner? Have you asked God for that special ability to see it though? Why not ask Him for it right now...

Lesson D-5 Faith and Treasure

1. The Bible says that "the love of money is the root of all types (or kinds) of evil." In what way does the love of money assist in certain kinds of evil coming out in our lives and in society?:

2. If it is true that the love of money aids in the production of certain evils, does it **always** lead to these evils? Can the right attitude toward it do **good** as well? Think of an example of money leading to good:

3. According to the following scriptures, where does the money we have come from?:
 - Ecclesiastes 5:19 (NIV)

 - I Chronicles 29:12 (NIV)

 - Deuteronomy 8:18 (NIV)

4. What are some of the specific dangers that the gift of money and possessions can present to us humans?:
 - I Timothy 6:9

 - Matthew 19:23

 - Mark 4:19

5. Read Hebrews 11:6 and Deuteronomy 8:13,14. What do you think: is "faith" something we are to use specifically in the process of accumulation and distribution of money?

What do you think might happen if we ignored "faith" in the way we collected and spent money?

6. Let us assume for a moment that **faith** means something on the order of "trusting as true what God has said about man and his condition" or "the statements from God about heaven and earth are accurate and we should live by them." According to the following verses, what truth is God asking us to *believe in* or *have faith in* ?:

- Matthew 6:19,20

- Luke 12:29-34

- I Timothy 6:17-19

7. This week's focus on care and prayer...

How much faith goes into the use of money in your home? That is a very personal question! So is this one: If someone went to the vault in heaven where your valuables -- the ones you sent on ahead -- were kept, how much would be there?

There is a reward for everyone that operates by faith in the area of money. Thank Him for the reward, and if faith is lacking here, ask for His guidance.

Lesson D-5 Faith and the Future

1. Tomorrow. When you think about tomorrow and the kind of God the Bible describes (you know, loving yet just, creative yet unchanging, powerful yet compassionate) what does tomorrow hold for you as an individual? Between now and Judgment Day, are you optimistic or about the future:
2. Assuming for a moment that we are optimistic about tomorrow , what kinds of things would we end up thanking God for after tomorrow had arrived?:
3. Let us suppose that tomorrow brought us some problems and heart-aches. What kinds of things could we thank God for in those circumstances? [To answer this question, think of a possible difficult circumstance and imagine what you might be thankful for within it]:
4. Read Psalm 40:1-10. How does David respond to the difficult situation he faced in verse 1? What were some of the things he did as a response to God's response?:

- vs. 3

- vs. 4

- vs. 5

- vs. 6

- vss. 7,8

- vs. 9

- vs. 10

5. This week's focus on care and prayer...

Can you remember the last time you sang a "New Song" to God for the things He has done? Perhaps you have never sung such a song. In our share and prayer time, see if you can discover something that you have never thanked God for before. Make that your "New Song." Share with God in prayer.

Lesson D-7 Faith and Generosity

1. Most of us grew up with some kind of "folk proverbs" about possessions -- and the lack of them. An example might be: "A penny saved is a penny earned" or "A bird in the hand is worth two in the bush." Share with the group a proverb about possessions that you learned in your earlier years:

2. The Bible is full of pointed little truths about possessions. Briefly identify the message or point of each of these little proverbial passages:
 - Deuteronomy 16:17

 - Ecclesiastes 5:19

 - Jeremiah 17:11

 - Proverbs 23:5

3. Here are some more of these little truths, but this time the focus is generosity and giving. Briefly state the point of each of the following:
 - Proverbs 11:18

 - Proverbs 15:8

- Proverbs 22:9

- Isaiah 58:10

4. Read I Timothy 6:18, Hebrews 13:16, and Deuteronomy 15:10,11. How important is giving in the plan that God has for this present world?:

5. Sometimes the way that God looks at the things we do seems to be very different than the way man sees it. The Bible says that God looks at the heart, at the inner man, and that He evaluates things from an eternal perspective:

- According to Luke 21:1-4, how does God regard a small gift from a poor man?
- According to Proverbs 3:9,10, how does God regard those who are generous with what's earned **first**?; how about those who give just what's left over at the end?

6. This week's focus on care and prayer...

The Bible says that where our treasure is, there is where our heart can also be found. This applies to those we love, those in need, and to the work of the Kingdom of God. It is interesting that similar principles apply to all three areas.

Regarding the priority of the Kingdom work, do you see yourself applying the generosity principles we have studied in this lesson? If not, would you like to? Do you believe Him for the blessing He promises if we are following Him in these principles?

If you are ready, ask Him -- through prayer -- to help you grow in the area of generosity. The Bible explains that He hears any time we ask according to His will. Remember, He loves you!

Lesson D-8 Faith and Obedience

1. We have all come to a traffic sign (even as a youngster) and had the strong urge to pass the sign without stopping to "save time". Yes, it would have been breaking the law and might have gotten us a ticket, yet there remains a strange and perverse little urge deep within us that still says "Go ahead! Do it!" We call it rebellion, but rebellion is really a part of a bigger problem disobedience.

This is, perhaps, a rather bold question to ask, but it will help us get started thinking about today's subject in a practical way: share with the group one area in which you have a problem being obedient:

2. What does the Bible say about the importance of being obedient? Summarize the point made in each of these passages:
 - I Samuel 15:22
 - Jeremiah 7:23
 - Acts 5:29
 - Ephesians 5:6
3. What are some of the benefits of being obedient to God? What promises does God make to those who obey Him?:
 - John 14:23

- I John 2:17

 - Deuteronomy 11:13-15

 - Deuteronomy 11:26-28

 - Luke 11:28
4. Read I Peter 1:13,14,22 and Acts 5:30-32 and II Corinthians 2:9. Some have said that since those who follow Christ are "no longer under the law", as Paul puts it, we no longer have to obey any laws. Is this a correct conclusion as to what "no longer under the law" means? Are we required to be obedient to God and His commands during this age?:
5. One of the most difficult areas for the Christian to be obedient to God's commands is in the area of giving (sometimes called stewardship). List a couple of the reasons why obedience is a problem here:
6. Read Malachi 3:10 and Matthew 23:23 (NIV). What is the command and the blessing concerning giving? That is, what does God expect us to obey and what does He promise in return?
7. This week's focus on care and prayer...

One of the greatest opportunities we have as God's creation is to follow our Maker's instructions and be blessed accordingly. He is literally waiting to bless us!

Is obedience to God something you wrestle with? Have you come to terms with His commands and blessings concerning giving?

With your group, see if you can share where you are on this subject. Please, be careful to share only at that level which is appropriate for you.

May God richly bless you as you share and grow.

Lesson D-9 FINDING & HAVING ENOUGH

1. A major chewing gum manufacturer advertises that one of their products provides "pure chewing satisfaction." If "to be satisfied" with something means "to have had enough" or "to need no more", could we rightly conclude that once we chewed their gum, we would not want any more of it?

There are many things that give temporary, often VERY temporary satisfaction. The real question, of course, is what gives satisfaction that lasts: "What are at least two things that really do satisfy us in this life?"

2. What are some of the things that discourage contentment in our lives today?
3. According to the following passages, what kinds of things or situations should help us achieve contentment?:
 - I Timothy 6:8
 - Hebrews 13:5
 - Luke 3:14
 - Job 36:11 (NIV)
 - Proverbs 19:23 (NIV)

4. Read Philippians 4:10-13. See if you can identify the following:

- Through what kind of circumstances does one learn how to be contented?
- According to the Word of God, where does the ability to be contented come from?
- In what kind of circumstances is it possible to be contented?
- Is contentment something you can figure out and achieve on your own?

5. Read (in the NIV) Daniel 4:4-8,25-27,28-32,34. From this slice of history from the life of a great king (Nebuchadnezzar), see if you can discover some answers to some age old questions on contentment:

- What kind of "contentment" do you think he had as mentioned at the start of this story?
- What did God do to teach this man the meaning of the word?
- Where did he finally have to look in order to find the peace of real contentment?

6. This week's focus on care and prayer...

This may be difficult for you to talk about, so don't be disturbed if you feel uncomfortable with it: are you content with your circumstances? God wants you to be at peace with Him and undisturbed by the loud appeals from the world. He wants you to be content. With your partner, discuss this important topic and pray together as the Lord leads.

Lesson E - 1 A Faith That Really Works

1. Describe a time when you had a faith that worked. it may have been a special event like a life threatening encounter in which you were rescued or a parking place on a rainy afternoon. Tell us about what you did to put faith to work:
 - How faith worked for you:

 - What you did to put faith to work:

2. See if you can as a group come up with some words and phrases that describe and define faith. How does it relate to:
 - John 15:15

 - John 14:18

 - John 13:1

3. Read Mark 11:20-24. How many times is “saying” or “speaking” referred to in verses 23 & 24? What is the role of actually speaking out the things we expect from God so far as putting faith to work is concerned?

4. Read Romans 4:13-17 in at least two versions. The Living Paraphrase renders the second half of verse 17 with: “...God will

accept all people in every nation who trust God as Abraham did. And this promise is from God himself, who makes the dead live again and speaks of future events with as much certainty as though they were already past.”

- How does the Lord Himself deal with the issue of faith? Does He speak in an uncertain or doubting way about the things he wants us to have faith in, or does he speak with full assurance? Why?
5. Read John 20:26-29. How important is the role of having confidence in an as yet unseen thing to the presence of a faith that works? In other words, must we “see something that is not in order to have genuine faith?
6. What kinds of things should we expect to receive by faith if we actually say we trust [believe, have faith] in God for?
- Philippians 4:13
 - Ephesians 3:20
 - I Peter 2:21
7. This week’s focus on care and prayer...

OBSERVATION: Most of us feel that we have very weak faith. But Jesus said that even the smallest portion of the right faith is enough to unlock the door to the promises of God! The RIGHT faith? We might call genuine faith as “Say-it” faith; speaking of the promises of God as

if they were actually true for us personally, and then relying on that promise.

FOCUS: With your group, talk about some of the different kinds of faith you experienced. do you have “say-it” faith? If you have the freedom to do so, share one area in which you are seeking to exercise genuine faith.

Lesson E-2 Peace With God

1. The Bible shines with many examples of a very special kind of peace that God says He can and will provide. In Luke 2:13,14 we read: “Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying, ‘Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to men on whom his favor rests.’”
What was the event that encouraged this proclamation?:

- According to this passage, what was the basis for a person claiming the peace that comes from God?

2. Share with the group some of the things that characterize peace; when you have had real peace, what was it like?

3. According to the following passages, what are some of the basic sources of peace? If we were to seek peace, where might we find it?:

- Psalms 119:165
- Isaiah 48:18
- John 16:33

- Galatians 5:22
4. Is peace something automatic that one receives from God on a permanent, once-and-for-all basis or does it come and go? Must we go after it and then must we maintain it once it has arrived?:
- Isaiah 27:5
 - Psalms 34:14
 - Colossians 3:15
 - I Peter 3:10-12
5. Read Isaiah 53:5, and Colossians 1:20 and respond to the following questions about peace:
- **Who** obtained our peace with God and **how** was it done?
 - What did it **cost**? What price had to be paid to acquire our peace?
 - What would it take for a person to acquire that peace for themselves?

6. This week's focus on care and prayer...

Strangely, during certain times of year (especially during the year end holidays) peace can be easily lost by us humans. Doctors, counselors and psychologists will tell you that some of the most heart breaking and painful spiritual and psychological needs become evident during these times.

Why? If we do not maintain our focus on the Lord for our peace – expecting man or a particular experience to provide it – we are relying on something that will inevitably fail us.

With your group, share some things that might get in the way of your peace this season, and, if you can, turn those hindrances over to the Lord. Seek His peace together.

Lesson E-3 A GOD WHO DESERVES OUR PRAISE

1. All of us have done some deed or had an experience that deserved some honest praise from friends, family or the public. Although most of us get at least a little embarrassed by the expressions of deserved praise – we may blush or even cry, we all have some strong reactions and feelings about it. Describe some of the things that happen within you when you receive appropriate praise. What are some of the good things that proper praise does in your life?

2. When God receives praise from His creation, what kinds of thoughts and feelings do you think He might have concerning it? What do you think is His inner response to praise?
 - What might be His feelings about a particular portion of His creation that did not praise Him? How might He respond? What might He do to it?

3. Read I Peter 2:9. In this passage are listed five reasons to praise God. Identify each of the five and see if you can define them in your own words:
 - Reason #1

 - Reason #2

- Reason #3
- Reason #4
- Reason #5
- Summary: Why is it proper to praise God for the items listed above? Why should God alone receive praise for them?

4. In the following passages are listed some of the ways and means for praising God. In your group, identify as many of them as you can:

- Psalm 9:11
- Psalm 33:2
- Psalm 52:9
- Isaiah 42:10-12
- Hebrews 13:15
- Luke 19:37

5. Reviewing the passages mentioned in the previous question, suggest answers to the following:

- What is the **most common means** of praising God actually used by believers today?
- What is the **least common means** used?

6. What method of praise do you think God prefers? Why?

- Given the various ways that God can be praised, what type or types need to be increased in this day and age?

7. This week's focus on care and prayer...

Literally dozens of times we are commanded to “Praise the Lord!” (sometimes rendered “Hallelujah!”) in the scriptures – especially in the Psalms. The reason for this is not stated specifically, but only given by way of example: it is good for God, it is right, and it is good for us.

Regarding its impact on us, the example of the Scriptures is that we are strengthened and are given greater advantage over evil when we practice praise.

With your group, talk about some of your strengths and weaknesses in the matter of praise. See if you can identify one method of praise which you might improve upon.

Lesson E-4 To Forgive Is Really Divine

1. Think of a time when you didn't get what you deserved in the way of a punishment. Out of an act of charity or compassion, someone took pity on you and kept you from getting a traffic ticket, a bad grade, a “poor work slip”, prevented you from getting fired or (you fill in the blank). In your group, discuss the following questions (please read both questions first before you respond):

- What was your overall emotional reaction to the compassion offered you? What kind of response did you have inwardly?
- How did you feel about the person who offered the forgiveness; how did you respond to them?

2. Defining FORGIVENESS: Because hurt is inevitable in a fallen world – everyone will fail or hurt someone else eventually, God offers us forgiveness so that no deed done could ever have to hinder our communion with Him or with each other. Various dictionaries and lexicons define forgiveness in various ways: “1) A benevolent act of superior generosity, 2) a sacrificial act of one-way absorbing of the other's debt, 3) an obedient act of unconditional acceptance.”

Match the following passages with the definition that comes closest to explaining the aspect of forgiveness revealed (this will not be an easy assignment but it will show us important things to consider when we offer forgiveness):

a. Acts 7:60

b. II Samuel 12:13

c. Luke 7:45-47

d. Ephesians 4:32

3. Which do you think brings the greater joy: seeing the results of **forgiveness given** in the life of the one to whom you gave it or experiencing **forgiveness received** from another for something you have done? Why?
4. Read Psalm 103:8-18. List the characteristics in this passage that describe, confirm or illustrate the fact that God is forgiving:
5. Read Matthew 6:12-15, Romans 12:14 and Colossians 3:13. How important is the concept of forgiveness toward others in the life of the believer? List some of the things that can happen to the person that uses it, that does NOT use it:
6. For our time of prayer and sharing...

Is there someone who has hurt you recently that you have not offered forgiveness toward? Is your heart cold toward them? Do you wish them a blessing – or a curse?

There are few truths more significant than this as proclaimed by the Lord Jesus on the pages of Scripture: forgiveness is vital for spiritual health and fulfillment.

Take time to pray for at least one person that falls into that category. You need not mention their name, but see if you can appropriate some of God's forgiveness to use to release the hurt you have by praying for them.

*The Title is taken from a line attributed to Alexander Pope, *An Essay On Criticism* (1711): "To err is human, to forgive is divine"

Lesson E-5 What God Really Wants In The Way Of A Gift

1. The holiday seasons bring with them the temptation to be somewhat extravagant – given all the things in this world that we can give to one another. A common complaint from the typical family is “we spent too much!” Perhaps the problem is not how much we spent but rather what we chose to give. Value often is not connected with price.

Looking back over special gifts you received over the years, what has been one or two that have been the most precious and meaningful to you? What was it about those gifts that gave them so much value?

2. Do you think God looks forward to receiving gifts from us the way we like to receive gifts from each other – or does the fact that He “has everything and therefore needs nothing” mean that He has little concern about receiving gifts? Discuss this in your group:
3. In the Bible are various records of occasions where gifts were offered to God either directly or indirectly. List the gift offered and describe (if the passage comments on it) how God felt about the gift:
 - Isaiah 56:7
 - Philippians 4:18
 - Hebrews 13:16

- Proverbs 15:8

 - Isaiah 1:11-15

 - Jeremiah 6:19,20
4. Read Romans 12:1,2 and discuss the following questions as they are dealt with in this passage:
- According to Paul, what is an important gift that God desires to have from us today? Putting it another way, what is on God's "wish list"?

 - In what form or in what kind of condition does God want this gift to come to Him?

 - What are some of the reasons why He wants this gift from us?

 - What kind of changes or impact should we expect IN OUR LIVES if God gets the gift mentioned in this passage from us?
5. We have studied what God wants in the way of a gift from us. How (as implied by the verses we have studied) are we to deliver the gift He has asked for, i.e., how do we send it to Him? How will we know He has it?

6. This week's focus on care and prayer...

The Bible gives us important clues as to the technique for giving gifts: It is the care and the heart behind the gift that is the really memorable part of our gift exchanges. Preparing or purchasing a gift that suits the one we wish to honor is also very important. It is appropriate to ask: “What do they need and want, and how can I really demonstrate my caring for them?”

In the same way, the Bible says that there are some things that God has on His “wish list” and one thing in particular heads that list. Have you given that gift to Him this year? Does He still have it – or did you find yourself taking it back?

With your group, talk about the things on God's list and about your response to it.

Lesson E-6 Helping Someone Take A Step With Jesus

1. Swimming or scuba diving alone: they say that it's a dangerous thing to do. Why? If you get into trouble, who will be there to help you? There are many activities or events that we should not try to do by ourselves. Take a few moments to list some situations in which it is impossible to proceed alone:
 - a. Describe some of the things that happen to us – inwardly – when we take a fall and find ourselves alone?

 - b. Read Hebrews 10:24,25. Does God want us to voluntarily avoid people when we are having spiritual challenges in our life?

2. What are some of the things we can do to help another person deal with a spiritual challenge in their life? (The following are just a very brief sampling of many such passages):
 - a. Romans 15:1-6

 - b. I Thessalonians 5:11

 - c. Acts 12:5

 - d. Ephesians 6:18-20

3. Read Romans 10:1. In the last passage mentioned above, we are told to pray for the church. But, does the Bible have anything to say about praying for hurting people that are not part of the church?

4. Read I Timothy 2:1-8. In this passage Paul teaches us important things we can do to help those around us take another step for Jesus. He also tells us something about the Lord's purpose and role in these steps:

- a. What are some of the important things Paul exhorts us to pray for according to this passage?

- b. What will be the practical result of the prayers offered for those in our community – especially the leaders (see verse 2b)?

- c. If Christians have the opportunity to live a peaceful and godly life, what will be one of the significant impacts on the community of people around them (see verse 4)?

5. Based on our study, does God want us to pray for non-Christians? What can we expect will be the result of our prayer? Will everyone we pray for become a Christian?:

6. For our time of prayer and sharing:

There are many people that we come into contact with each day that need to take another step with Jesus. We can begin that process by taking the time to pray for them.

With your group, see if you can identify three people (each) as the special target for your sincere salvation prayer. (Write them down please.)

Because it is the Lord's great desire that men and women be saved (I Timothy 2:4), we know that he will respond to this prayer with action that only can perform.

May God richly bless you as you engage in this important work.

Lesson E-7 WHEN GOD SEEMS FAR AWAY

1. There are many differing opinions as to the way a person becomes a true follower of God. Some say it is this way and some say it is that. One thing is usually consistent and generally agreed upon: the result of one becoming a true follower of God is intimacy with God; true believers experience a closeness with God. In your group, describe some of the methods that various religious groups use to become closer to God. [Note: please, we need not mention names of the groups or religions who have the practices you will use as illustrations.]:

2. What does the Bible say needs to happen for a person to become a Christian and have intimacy (the Bible uses the word “fellowship”) with God?:
 - Revelation 3:20
 - Galatians 2:20
 - Ephesians 3:14,16•19

3. What do you think: If a person becomes a true believer in Jesus Christ and has fellowship – intimacy – with God, is it possible to lose that intimacy? How? Why?

4. According to the following passages, what does the Bible say is the reason we lose our intimacy with God?
 - Isaiah 59:2
 - Ezekiel 14:5
 - II Peter 2:15
 - Isaiah 59:2

5. When we feel as if we are far from God, the Bible describes some of the means by which we can again draw close to Him. In the following passages, identify the means by which we can draw close to God:

- Hebrews 7:18,19,25
- Hebrews 10:22
- James 4:8

6. This week's focus on care and prayer...

The lesson this week is quite simple, so simple we can over look it with considerable ease: we drift quietly and silently away from God – like a boat adrift on the sea – when we sin and do not clear it up with God.

And how do we clear it up with God? That too is so simple we can very easily over look it too: “If we confess our sins... He will forgive us and cleanse us...” I John 1:9

It must be distressing to God to see those He loves drift from Him when the remedy is so near at hand. With your group, read the passage in James 5:16 and apply it in a way that seems appropriate to you. And, may God bless you as you as you seek His fellowship.

Lesson F-1 God's Secret To Confident Living

1. Humility. It is a wonderful characteristic which is praised by many both of the past and of the present. But it is not something they teach in school and – while growing up – it did not always seem to be a good thing to practice. When you think of the way people generally look at humility, what words come to mind?:

2. While reading the following scriptures – scriptures which demonstrate humility – try to define what the Bible means by this term: I Kings 3:7 (Solomon is speaking); Matthew 8:8; Psalm 131:1.

3. Sometimes it is helpful to understand a concept, idea or problem by looking at its opposite and, of course, the opposite of humility is pride. As we look at the following examples of pride, describe the aspect of pride that is revealed:
 - Exodus 5:2
 - II Chronicles 32:25
 - Isaiah 14:13,14
4. Read Daniel 5:18-24,30. In this passage is the story of two men who learned something about pride and humility:
 - Who was the first man and what lesson did he learn?

 - Who was the second man and what lesson did he fail to learn?

5. Read the following passages and identify what either pride or humility brings to the one who practices them:

- Proverbs 11:2

Pride:

Humility:

- Proverbs 13:10

Pride:

Humility:

- Habakkuk 2:4

Pride:

Humility:

- Matthew 23:12

Pride:

Humility:

5. In your group, discuss the following: To what extent are we able to make a choice between humility and pride? Are we doomed to having pride dominate or are we able to actually choose to be humble? If so, how do we go about making that choice?

6. Focus on care and prayer...

Pride is the desire to take the seat of a God, to decide one's own laws and to be indifferent to the value of others, especially those we don't care for. Humility is a loving and caring attitude that says: "All of God's creation is worthy of my respect." It also says: "The Lord rules; what He decides is my law."

With your group, talk about an example of pride that you might have experienced. Are you that example? Have you said yes to humility? Could you say yes to humility before God?

Talk about it, and see where the Lord leads...

Lesson F-2 Meekness: Putting The Spirit To Work

1. It's the annual family picnic. All the relatives are there and everyone is poised for a good time. The weather is great and the food is abundant. At game time, the annual softball game has commenced when, rather unexpectedly, a dispute about a foul ball breaks out. There are some harsh words exchanged. Uncle Fred packs up the family and goes home. It was a long time before they again saw him or his family at the annual picnic.
 - Using your sanctified imagination, describe the response of the rest of the relatives at the moment Uncle Fred left the picnic:
 - Based on the information you have been provided in this story, do you think Uncle Fred did the right thing?
 - What is it about us humans that makes us “take up our things and go home” like Uncle Fred?
2. Read I Peter 3:8-17. How do you think Jesus would have acted if He had been in Uncle Fred's place? How would He have wanted *us* to act in a similar spot?
3. The word “meek” appears a number of times in the Bible (31 in the KJV) and is always regarded as very positive thing. Using the context of the following passages as a guide, give what seems to be the meaning of “meek”:
 - II Corinthians 10:1-3
 - Zepheniah 3:11-13
 - I Peter 3:15 [KJV; *gentle* , NASB]

- Numbers 12:1-3 [KJV]

4. Read Galatians 5:22,23. In verse 23, one of the items mentioned is *gentleness* [i.e. “meekness”].
 - What is this list? How does one acquire the characteristics mentioned?
 - Are the items mentioned automatically received or must they continually be sought?
5. Read Psalm 37:8-15. Jesus said: “Blessed are the *meek* for they shall inherit the earth.” In this He was quoting Psalm 37:11 which says essentially the same thing. But in that Old Testament passage is a wonderful promise, a promise with a blessing and a curse. What is the blessing? What is the curse?
6. Focus on care and prayer...

Meekness is not a popular concept because it usually is thought of as a liability rather than something good and beneficial. In the face of tension and hostility, the Lord teaches us that there is great blessing to everyone that would seek to take meekness and apply it, to stand before the enemy and say: “I refuse to quarrel with you and fight your fight. As far as it depends on me, I will be at peace with all men.”

That takes courage and faith. That takes trusting in the Lord for His protection. It is not pacifism. It is a bold step into the fight to end it.

With your group, ask the Lord to show you where you can apply meekness in a fresh way in your life.

Lesson F-3 Thirst & Hunger: It Will Meet A Real Need

1. Take a few minutes and describe some of the outward and inward sensations that accompany real hunger and genuine thirst. How does the body react? What kind of thoughts go through our minds?

2. We generally have the idea that going without food and/or water is a bad thing and injurious to our health; the very experience of hunger and thirst is to be avoided by regular intake of food and water. But hunger and thirst are not always a thing to be avoided. Describe some examples of times when going without food and water – keeping ones appetite – could be a good thing:

3. Jesus tells us that there are some things that we should seek after with at least as much zeal than we might use to seek after the physical things such as food and water. In the following verses, identify the item we are to apply our appetite to:
 - Matthew 5:6
 - Colossians 1:9
 - Ephesians 5:18
 - Psalms 63:1
 - Psalms 73:25

4. By contrast, there are many things which do not satisfy when we go after them with our appetites. In the following passages, identify the objects of these vain efforts:
 - Ecclesiastes 1:8
 - Ecclesiastes 5:10

- John 4:13,14

- Ecclesiastes 6:7

5. Read Luke 15:13-21. In this story of the wandering son, the father generously gives to the son what he might squander and then lets him go. The son spends his wealth on his appetites...

- What did the son spend his wealth on?

- What was the result of his spend spree? • What caused him to give up his old ways and go home?

- What did the son long for when thought about home? More wealth?

- What do you think the son did with his appetites once he returned home? What did he focus on when he got back?

6. Focus on care and prayer...

There are many things that we humans are attracted to when the moment comes to spend our resources, whether that resource be time or money. The Bible says that the blessing will come if our focus is on the Master, on Jesus, one the Father who loves us. He is the one that satisfies each time we have a need.

Take a little inventory: what do you use to satisfy your needs and desires? Is it “stuff” or “power” or “prestige”?

With your group, spend a few moments exploring the centrality of Jesus as far as your desires and appetites are concerned. Is He in the center? If not, will you place Him there – soon?

Lesson F-4 The Blessings Of A Pure Heart

1. FAN. While today the word has a rather positive meaning, this has not always been the case. FAN comes from “fanatic”, which, in turn, comes from a Latin word meaning “temple”. It seems that many of the ancient worshippers of the pagan gods were vigorous to the point of extremes in their worship practices. Describe some of the characteristics of a modern FAN:

2. One modern dictionary calls a FAN “an enthusiastic admirer or supporter”. If a person claimed to be true FAN of the Lord Jesus Christ, what might they be found doing? What might they be like?

3. Jesus tells us that we are to be “pure in heart” [see Matthew 5:8] and by this He seems to mean that He wants us to be FANS of God. In the following passages, see if you can identify the characteristics of a person with a “pure heart”, that is, a FAN of God:
 - Psalms 26:6

 - Psalms 24:3,4

 - I Timothy 1:5

 - IPeter 1:22

 - Hebrews 11:27

4. What are some of the benefits of a pure, loyal and devoted heart toward God? In the following passages identify some of the blessings that came to God's FANs:
 - Job 11:15

 - IPeter 1:22

 - Matthew 5:8

 - John 16:15

 - John 14:19

5. Read Psalm 32. In this brief Psalm we discover some of the things that cut short the blessings of a FAN of God. We also discover some of the best methods to restore the single minded devotion which Jesus seeks:
 - According to this Psalm, what is a main factor hindering the pure in heart from maintaining their relationship with God? (vs. 1,2)

 - When caught in the cords of sin, what is the typical response that must be avoided? (vs. 3,4)

 - What effective action did the Psalmist take regarding his problem and how did the Lord respond? (vs. 5)

- What instruction does he give in light of his encounter with a forgiving God?

- What does he say will happen if we do not respond as a FAN would respond?

6. Focus on care and prayer...

Are you a “fan” of Jesus Christ? We are not speaking of extremes, but the quality of loyal and enthusiastic support of His cause and His reputation. Is there anything that might be standing in the way of your being that kind of member of His kingdom?

Take a few minutes to talk with your group about the questions just mentioned. If you feel free to do so, please talk to God about what you have learned about your devotion to Him. He would love to hear from you.

Lesson F-5 Making Peace With Everyone

1. When we consider the word PEACE, we must face the fact that in this world there are many different ideas as to what PEACE is and where it can be found. *Where* do people seek for PEACE in our times? Describe several methods used for attempting to achieve it:

2. Read Romans 12:18 and 14:19. According to these two passages, describe the importance of the priority of peace in the church:

3. The following passages tell us about the importance and source of peace; describe briefly what each verse says about obtaining it:
 - Galatians 1:3
 - James 3:17
 - Romans 14:16-19
 - Proverbs 3:13-17
 - Psalm 119:165

4. It has been said that: “When a man finds no peace within himself, it is useless to look elsewhere for it.” What do you think, is this true?:

5. Is there a difference between social peace, political peace and spiritual peace?:

6. Read Ephesians 2:8-18. In this passage, Paul describes the method that God used to bring people together and to bring people together with God. Using the following questions, see if you can

discern how Jesus becomes the means for solving the problems people have with their relationships – both with and without.:

- What is one of the basic reasons God has created us? (vs. 8-10)

- What barrier formerly stood between peoples that hindered effective and lasting peace? (vs. 11,12)

- What did God do to remove the barrier to peace? (vs. 13-15a)

- Once God solved mankind's peace problem, what did he do to help us take advantage of that solution ? (vs.17,18)

7. Focus on care and prayer...

“Peace is the deliberate adjustment of my life to the will of God.” That statement tells us much about the practical application of peace. God's provision is that we have harmony with him, harmony with each other, and harmony within. His provision makes it possible to have any one of these at any time, but His desire is that we have each of them all the time.

Is any one of these faces of peace missing in your life? Are the three in balance? If not, do you see what might be missing? If you are able, Share your perspective with your group, and may God bless you as you share.

Lesson F-6 On Being A Light In A Dark Place

1. Many of us, while still very young, experienced a certain amount of fear about the dark. What might have been some of the reasons for this fear?
 - Often our parents provided us with a night light, which, though very small, seemed to help diminish our fears about the dark. What was it about such a tiny light that helped conquer what was some times an awesome fear?:

2. Read John 3:19-21. We know and experience the physical darkness that rules the night. Is there a spiritual darkness that rules this world? If so, how do we know that it does exist?

3. Read Ephesians 6:11,12. Is there something in that spiritual darkness that we ought to have some serious concern about? If so, what is it?:

4. In the following passages identify the character of spiritual darkness (what is it like) and how we end up in the middle of it (describe the way it snares us):
 - Proverbs 4:19
 - Proverbs 2:12-15 (NIV)
 - I John 1:6
 - Deuteronomy 28:15; 28,29

- II Corinthians 6:14-16

5. Read Acts 26: 15-18 and Ephesians 5:8-14a. If we find that we are in the middle of some spiritual darkness, what can we do to get out from the middle of it? What does God give us as a means of escape?:

6. Based on our study thus far, what are some of the ways that a person can stay in the light and out of the darkness?:

7. Read Matthew 5:14-16, John 8:12, and I John 1:5. Strictly according to these passages, who provides the light that the world needs in order to be able to see the truth?:

8. Focus on care and prayer...

It is very important that we be sure to realize who the real enemy is when we are dealing with matters of spiritual darkness. Often we are tempted to look on people as the enemy rather than seeing them as victims of the enemy. We are told in scripture to love and bless our enemies – not judge or condemn them. Being a light in a dark place means shedding light on this fact.

It also means wrestling with the powers of darkness with regard to evil in this world, particularly as it takes the form of temptation or moral evils.

Are your “spiritual lights” burning brightly? Share with your group the need to be a shining light and areas the Lord might be speaking to you about: turn up the lights together!

Lesson F-7 God's Ways Are Higher – Much Higher

1. The unexpected. Sometimes things don't turn out quite the way we figured they would. "Yes," we might add, "they turn out worse." There is a modern proverb that has been identified with a man named Murphy: "If it can go wrong, it will go wrong." But life is not always like that. Describe some a personal event that turned out much better than we could have hoped for, something that might have appeared to be a disaster but turned out for the good:

2. Read Romans 8:28,36-39. Does God have in mind to injure and destroy His children? Does He have good intentions for them and the outcome of events concerning them?

3. Read II Corinthians 4:15-18. Though some things seem to be going wrong, and some things seem to be worn out, what does this present tribulation really mean?:

4. In the following passages are specific difficult situations being experienced by people who cry out to God. They seem to be facing the impossible but God has a different idea. In each of the situations, pretend you are the one facing the difficulty. From that perspective, try to answer the questions that follow:
 - a. Read Exodus 14:10-12; 23-28:
 - What is their difficulty?

 - What were they afraid was going to happen?

- What actually did happen?
- Did they experience any difficulty or pain?
- Was the experience worth the pain? Did God let them down?

b. Read Acts 28:1-6

- What is their difficulty?
- What were they afraid was going to happen?
- What actually did happen?
- Did they experience any difficulty or pain?
- Was the experience worth the pain? Did God let them down?

c. Read Acts 12:5-17

- What is their difficulty?
- What were they afraid was going to happen?

- What actually did happen?

 - Did they experience any difficulty or pain?

 - Was the experience worth the pain? Did God let them down?
5. In light of these various events, would it be reasonable to expect that God would respond to a situation or a predicament in a way and on a schedule completely different than our own?:
6. Read Isaiah 55:9,10 and briefly summarize the thought given therein:
7. Focus on care and prayer...

Many times we evaluate the value of an event based on initial information and first conclusions, but, as it turns out, the meaning after all the data is in is usually quite different. We are in danger if we jump to conclusions about what God is doing with us!

Do you trust the Lord to do well in events you do not understand? Do you have the faith that the final outcome will be in your best interests? As you share in prayer with your group, see if you can open your heart to being willing to accept and trust in His outcome.

Lesson F-8 Laws That Help Not Hinder

1. You have just gone to the checkout counter with a gallon of milk at a store you frequent, and you are in a hurry. “Just put the change in the sack,” you tell the clerk as you hand him a \$5 bill. You’re back at home and you sort through the change as you pour a glass milk for yourself. You discover that instead of change for a \$5, you were given change for a \$10. Which law applies: “Finders keepers, losers weepers” or “You shall not steal.” How would you apply the rule you select?
 - What would you do if there were no rules concern keeping or returning the money?
2. Read II Timothy 2:1-7. Why is it so important for a person to abide by the rules when in a struggle – especially if that struggle is on behalf of God and against sin?
3. Read Matthew 17:24-27. What was Jesus’ attitude toward the various religious laws in His day? Did he – as a rule – keep them , even if they seemed inappropriate or even unfair?:
4. According to the following passages, why did God make laws for us to follow?

- Romans 3:20

 - Romans 7:7

 - What actually did happen?

 - Did they experience any difficulty or pain?

 - Was the experience worth the pain? Did God let them down?
5. Read Romans 8:1- 4 and Romans 5:20,21. What are at least two major weaknesses of the law as described in the Bible

 6. Read Isaiah 55:9,10 and briefly summarize the thought given therein:

 7. Focus on care and prayer...

Many times we evaluate the value of an event based on initial information and first conclusions, but, as it turns out, the meaning after all the data is in is usually quite different. We are in danger if we jump to conclusions about what God is doing with us!

Do you trust the Lord to do well in events you do not understand? Do you have the faith that the final outcome will be in your best interests? As you share in prayer with your group, see if you can open your heart to being willing to accept and trust in His outcome.

Lesson F-9 Love* Prevents All Sorts Of Trouble

[Before your group begins sharing this lesson together, please read from the “Meaning of God’s Love” at the end of this lesson.]

1. We often think of love as the starting place for relationships with the people that become special to us. “Isn’t true love wonderful!” we say to ourselves and to others. But love also keeps difficult situations from becoming worse and can even turn bad situations around. Can you recall an example from your life or from history where love kept people from hurting each other?:
2. Read I Peter 4:8. [See also Proverbs 10:12 & 17:9]. The phrase “covers over” means “to build a bridge over” or to “obscure with a covering.” Suggest what specific things might be “covered over” by love as indicated by these verses. Try to think of things from everyday life:
3. Read Colossians 3:14 and I John 4:16. When the Bible says we are to love others, it usually uses the word “agape” which means love that has no conditions, no limits, no deadlines. It is a love that does not quit. In your own words, describe the importance of the role this love can play in our every day relationships:
4. Read I John 4:19 and I Thessalonians 3:12. Where do the Apostles John and Paul expect the ability to love – love in the face of antagonism and hatred – to come from?:

5. What are some of the blessings that come to those who practice sincere, genuine love of those around them – even those that might be called enemies?

- I John 2:10

- I Corinthians 8:1

- Romans 13:8

- Mark 9:41

6. Read I John 2:9. [See also John 3:15 and 4:20.] According to the Bible, is it possible to walk with God and not love our brother? If we hate someone, what is true of our love?

7. After examining the various passages that speak of the priority of love, do you think love is strong enough to overcome hate?

Can it prevent evil?

Can this type of love stop people from harming each other?

8. Focus on care and prayer...

When we have a fever, we reach for the aspirin (or its substitute); when we are thirsty we reach for a glass of refreshing beverage; when we have a cut on our hand, we look for a bandage. If we have an outbreak of hate or contention, should we not look for love?

Is there someone within your world that could and should be receiving your love – but is not? If you have the freedom, share the situation with your group and ask the Lord for that extra measure of love here. If you are not short of love this week, then thank Him for the love you have and consider asking Him to make your love to abound even more freely to others.

The Meaning Of God's Love

God's Love Is...

...without any conditions
print" in it

...eager to build godly character
pleasure

...confident and assured
confirmed

...seeks to spread joy

...not "touchy"

...experienced as satisfaction
satisfaction

...gives regularly

The World's Love is...

...always has some "fine

...eager to experience

...always needs to be

...seeks to receive joy

...often is very sensitive

...is constantly in need of

...regularly takes

Lesson F-10 Sincere Love Wins In The End – And Sometimes Earlier!

1. Love does not always win at the start. In fact it usually takes time for love to have its full impact. Tell about a time when love finally won in a situation in which you were involved. [It will be difficult (we understand!) but you will need to be brief]:

2. Read I Peter 1:22 (NIV). Take a few minutes to analyze this important passage and answer the following questions:
 - What activity, mentioned at the start of the verse, must take place if genuine love (godly love, agape) is to have a chance to spring forth and grow?

 - What “truth” do you think Peter is speaking of when he refers to the practice of “obeying the truth”?

 - What is the initial involuntary result of “obeying the truth” ? That is, what does God do in the heart of the person who believes what God has said about people, about love, and about His love?

 - The word translated “earnestly” or “deeply” or “fervently” which appears near the end of this verse comes from two Greek words having the meaning “out” and “stretch.” Putting them together we come up with the word’s literal meaning “to

make a thing last as long as possible.” What is to be “stretched out” and how might we help keep it that way?

3. Read John 15:12. List some of the ways, or approaches to love that Jesus used to express His love and commitment to His disciples. [Please be careful on this one, the tendency is to miss some of the obvious things that Jesus did.]

4. According to the following passages, what are some of the important things love from God is able to do? Or, putting it another way, when we love the way God loves, what kind of characteristics do we see expressed?
 - Romans 12:9a

 - Hebrews 13:1

 - Colossians 3:14

6. Read I Corinthians 16:13 and Galatians 5:6b. Can you think of someone in the Bible that actually practiced “love by faith”?

7. Focus on care and prayer...

So much gets said about love that at times we wonder what it is and what it is for. Lost in the plea for love is the meaning and source of genuine love. God demonstrated in the life and work of Jesus Christ both the character and the source of genuine love.

To love God's way is to ask Him to give us the love we and those around us so desperately need. Our prayer might go something like this: "Lord, I know that needs to be loved today. Lord I don't feel much like loving them today, but I know that we can love abundantly – even more than we might ask or think – because of Jesus' love for us. So, thank you for your love for me and the promises you have made. Please help me to love today, and by your grace and in your name I will love them. Amen."

May God grant your request as you pray today.

The Meaning Of God's Love (a review):

God's Love Is...

...without any conditions
in it

...eager to build godly character

...confident and assured

...seeks to spread joy

...not "touchy"

...experienced as satisfaction
satisfaction

...gives regularly

The World's Love is...

...always has some "fine print"

...eager to experience pleasure

...always needs to be confirmed

...seeks to receive joy

...often is very sensitive

...is constantly in need of

...regularly takes

Lesson G-1 Practical Power Pointers

1. Most of us have experienced a time of intense physical activity that left us spent, unable to do much more than move. Describe some of the feelings that go with this kind of fatigue? (i.e., what would you say if someone asked you how you felt at such a time?):

2. When we experience weariness in our inner man (say, in our human spirit) would we experience the weakness in a similar way? How would they be the same? Differ?:

3. Ephesians 3:14-21 (NIV). Notice that the word "power" is mentioned three times in this version (twice or four times in other versions). It is the central idea of this passage. Various words are used to express the concept of power, but the two principle thoughts are: power, the right to take action; power, the ability or the might that enables one to take the action desired. With these definitions in mind, consider the following questions:
 - From where does God draw the power that he shares with us? (vs.16)

 - If we wish to have this power from God, how do we obtain it? What must we do to share in it? Is it something we deserve or earn? (vs.16,17)

 - How do we experience the power of God? In our muscles? Our mind? Our emotions? In our spirit? (vs.17)

- What is one of the principle purpose of the power which God gives us? What activity does God want us to invest the power in? (vs.18,19)

 - According to verse 20, would it be possible to use up God's power? Could we ever think of or ask from God for something that he or we through Him would not have adequate power to accomplish?
4. According to the following passages, are some of the reasons why people experience a loss of power from God. See if you can identify what that reason is and suggest a way to prevent or overcome it.
- Joshua 7:12
 - Mark 9:18
 - John 15:5
5. Read I Thessalonians 1:5, Acts 4:33, and Acts 1:8. These three passages reflect the typical kinds of activity that God's power is used for in this life. What are these principle activities and what might happen with reference to our experiencing God's power if we decided not to become involved with these activities?
6. This week's focus on care and prayer

Feel weak and defeated at times? Yes, most of us do. But the Bible says that we have a God who enters us and will provide power if we ask. But it seems that we must ask. It is not normal, or automatic, or present with us all the time in an unending basis.

Every day things come into our lives that block the power. Sometimes the power does not come because we simply want to use it just for our own selfish purpose. Sometimes we just don't ask for it.

Think for a moment: have you asked Him for His power today? Anything getting in the way? Share as seems fitting as to your need in this area then pray together. May God richly bless you as you do.

Lesson G-2 Staying Strong When Everything Else Seems To Be Giving Way

1. Peer pressure is often very hard to resist. When the "gang" is getting off track but you've been with them for a long time, it's hard not to go with them. Tell about a time when you saw peer pressure at work. Why was it so hard to say "No!":

2. Do peer pressure situations always have to be negative? Can you think of a time when peer pressure has actually worked for the doing of good instead of evil?:

3. In I Samuel 1 and 2 is the story of a woman named Hannah who struggled with a number of problems in her society and home that very much complicated resolution of her own struggles. In the following passages are found some of the pressures facing her. Try to describe these pressures as if they were happening to someone today (i.e., in our culture and in our town):
 - I Samuel 1:6,7
 - I Samuel 1:8
 - I Samuel 3:1b
 - I Samuel 2:12,17
4. Read I Samuel 1:10. What was Hannah's approach to her problem in the face of all the peer pressure she was receiving?

5. Read I Samuel 1:11. Just how desperate had Hannah become in order to have a child? If there had been a doctor with a procedure or some kind of medical approach to her problem, do you think she would have called on the Lord in this way?

6. Read I Samuel 1:13-18; 2:19-21. Did Hannah end up with an earthly prayer partner and some positive peer pressure? Who was it? Was her prayer answered? To what degree?

7. The Bible has much to say about negative and positive peer pressure. Try to identify at least one key principle on this subject in each of the following passages:
 - Proverbs 13:20

 - I Corinthians 5:11

 - Ecclesiastes 4:9

8. This week's focus on care and prayer

Often we face problems, sometimes very personal problems, which we find difficult to bring out into the open but which beg for an answer or a solution. We may be afraid to share them for fear that others will not treat them with the same concern we have for them; we may believe they will make us feel ashamed, foolish, or inadequate.

The truth is that there is someone out there -- yes, the Lord, but someone else too -- that will walk with us, someone sent by God. That someone may make a mistake at the start or along the way, but they are God's answer to negative peer pressure. They are there to help. Eli got off on the wrong foot with Hannah, yet because she refused to judge him, she ended up receiving a blessing and help from him.

Do you have something in your life that needs some positive peer pressure and a group? Maybe you need to start small. If you can start today with that struggle, maybe you can find that group and encourager in your life and world today. God bless you as you seek Him for this now.

Lesson G-3 Staying Strong When It Seems You Just Can't Go On

1. When a boxer quits a fight, his manager throws in the towel; when a racer car driver quits a race, he pulls into the pits; when a person leaves a job, he turns in his resignation ("gives notice"); when a fiancé quits a relationship, she gives back the ring. What are some other ways of giving up on someone or something -- or yourself?:

2. Tell about a time in your life or in the life of someone you know when it was difficult to go on. This can be a particular part of life (such as a job or a relationship) or about life in general. Describe in your own words the emotional state of a person in such a situation:

3. Read II Corinthians 1:8,9. Paul had a number of trials in his life and at several points along the way he began to despair. How does Paul describe the circumstances in which he finds himself? If you had to guess, what kind of trial do you think he is going through: Rejection? Poverty? Disappointment? Illness?

4. The following passages record the emotions of several individuals who were in despair. See if you can identify the individual and perhaps the reason for their despair:
 - Acts 27:20
 - I Kings 19:4
 - Job 7:15
 - Jonah 4:3

- Matthew 27:5
5. One of the individuals in question 4 is quite different in terms of the outcome of the despair. Which one is different and why is it so?
 6. Read II Corinthians 1:8-11. How did Paul deal with his despair? What did he do? What did he count on?
 7. Read II Timothy 4:6-8. What was the outcome of Paul's despair? Did his approach to his "dark time" help?
 8. This week's focus on care and prayer

Do you know someone in despair right now -- even as we meet? What kind of activity on our part is appropriate under the circumstances? Would you be able to help someone if you discovered them going through a difficult time?

These questions have one answer with two parts: show them God and demonstrate His love through prayer and caring.

Perhaps you are experiencing despair in one or more areas of life. Let someone pray for you -- and love you. The saints of old used this method with great profit.

Do you know someone in such a situation. Pray for them right now. You need not mention names or you may not be ready to pray -- but let someone pray. God will surely bless you if you do.

Lesson G-4 Staying Strong With A Faith That Just Doesn't Quit

1. Ol' Faithful. Hearing the words might make us think of a famous fountain in Yellowstone National Park, or an old car that seemed to stay around the family for years --always there when needed. Think of some other things that might qualify as faithful in your world and in your experience. (Let's limit ourselves to non-people items for this question):

2. Think back to your encounters with people that impressed you as being faithful. What were some of the attitudes and behavior patterns that qualified them as a faithful person?:

3. More than 100 times in the Bible God is described as being faithful. The following passages are just a few examples. As you read the verses, try to identify why God is seen as faithful by the writer of the passage:
 - Psalm 145:13 .
 - Deuteronomy 7:9 .
 - I Kings 8:56 .
 - Psalm 111:7,8

4. If, according to these passages, God is faithful, then what can we say about Him with respect to the following?
 - His love?

- His patience?

 - His promises?

 - His forgiveness?

 - His protection?
5. Read I Thessalonians 5:23,24. If God begins to do a good work with respect to the spiritual life in a person, what can we expect of God as to the energy for the task? The completion of the task?
6. Read Psalm 111:2-10. What ought to be the response of people to the faithfulness of God? Specifically, how is it appropriated and what should be our attitude toward it?
7. This week's focus on care and prayer

Is God faithful? Yes, of course He is. But what difference does this make to the average people -- like each of us? It means that God can be trusted, and that He consistently has mankind's best interests at stake when He acts; we can count on it!

It also means that we can entrust either loved ones or specific situations into His care and know that he will do well with them. Is there someone or something you need to turn over to him as we close with a time of prayer? Consider: what might be holding you back from giving this situation into His hands?

There are many promises in the Bible that we fail to claim -- at least in part -- because we somehow feel that God is not trustworthy. Can you identify a promise that you might have difficulty trusting God in? If you can share that at this time, it may well be the first step in being able to claim that promise and trust Him for the result! God bless you as you share.

Lesson G-5 Being Loyal In A Disloyal World

1. Patriotism requires as its basic foundation, a genuine, sincere love and loyalty toward the nation to which it is directed. Patriots are regularly honored by fellow countrymen and often given special recognition and privileges. Name a favorite patriot and describe something patriotic he did which impressed you:

2. If a person proves to be disloyal (and unpatriotic) what are some of the things he might find himself doing?:
 - Does disloyalty always involve an enemy; can a person be disloyal to his country while doing something for a friend?

3. Read Matthew 5:27,28 and Hebrews 13:5. What word does the Bible use to describe someone who is disloyal toward their spouse?:
 - What do you think: is this activity very common today? If so, is it on the increase? Can you think of some reasons why or why not?

4. According to the following passages, what can happen to someone who is disloyal to his/her spouse? How does God feel toward such disloyalty?:
 - I Corinthians 6:9
 - I Corinthians 10:6-8

- II Samuel 12:13,14 .
5. In the Bible there are many warnings about committing adultery. Most of them are described in terms of a man escaping the snares of such a sin. However, most of these passages apply equally well to a woman's escape. According to the following passages, what are the key methods a person can employ to guard against falling into adultery?
- Proverbs 23:26-28 .
 - Proverbs 2:11-18
 - Proverbs 5:3-10 ..
 - Job 31:1 .
6. Read Galatians 6:1-5. Although we might not be directly involved with adultery, should we become involved in situations where we see it going on in the lives of others? When is it "none of our business"?

7. This week's focus on care and prayer

The subject for our study has been loyalty, but a special kind, loyalty toward spouses. This is a very touchy topic but must be faced by all of us if we are to be responsible, caring, and godly Believers.

It would be inappropriate for us to ask if there was adultery in heart or deed in our lives and make that public with our prayer partners, but we can ask ourselves if our "eye gates" are vulnerable to temptations in this area.

Take a few moments to pray for the practical holiness and protection of your partner tonight. Only the Lord can protect our minds and hearts. God bless you as you pray.

Lesson G-6 Finding Faith When You're Down

1. **Morale.** The dictionary says it means "the state of a person's or a group's spirits and confidence." It is often used to focus in on an athletic teams mental readiness for a game, or an army's attitude towards its own success in a conflict. Describe an incident in history or from your own experience when the morale of a group was UP:

- Now a time when it was DOWN .

2. There are many reasons why a person's morale might be down. List some of the conditions or situations of various types that might lead to a person feeling this way. [Try to think of a broad spectrum of things]:

3. In II Corinthians 4, Paul writes of a situation that normally would be morale threatening but his experience does not match the circumstances. Discover the approach he recommends as you examine the following passage:

8 We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; 9 persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed. 10 We always carry around in our body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be revealed in our body. 11 For we who are alive are always being given over to death for Jesus' sake, so that his life may be revealed in our mortal body

- a. Paul's **MORALE IMPROVEMENT PROGRAM** begins with an important first step. What important recognition leads the way?

- b. As long as what condition exists can we expect to have our positive morale challenged?

14 we know that the one who raised the Lord Jesus from the dead will also raise us with Jesus and present us with you in his presence. 15 All this is for your benefit, so that the grace that is reaching more and more people may cause thanksgiving to overflow to the glory of God. 16 Therefore we do not lose heart.

- c. What understanding does Paul have about the course of life in general that helps him keep his morale up?

- d. According to Paul, what will be the eventual outcome of all of the morale challenging events we may encounter during our lifetime?

Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day. 17 For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. 18 So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.

- e. What general strategy does Paul take when trying to get a handle on facing morale deflating experiences? (i.e., what does he try to think about to keep his sense of perspective?)

4. In the last question, Paul finds his morale restored, his hope renewed when he looks at the ETERNAL. Based on what you know about this subject from the Bible, what might this eternal be like?:

5. Many people have had their hope restored and their morale renewed by their study of God's word and fixing their eyes on heaven and just keeping a glance on earth. Why do you think this procedure works so well for so many different kinds of people?

6. This week's focus on care and prayer

There are certainly many different ways to get hope back when it seems to be gone (e.g. talking to a godly friend, dealing with a sin problem when it exists, proper sleep, diet, and exercise, etc.]. But, problems of the soul do not go away with Band-Aids, oatmeal, and warm platitudes.

Truth, reality and wisdom that comes from above is the only lasting cure for spiritual morale deflators.

Is your morale flagging a bit today? It might be hard to talk about with your prayer partner, but you know the Lord is always listening. Let Him hear from you today. And, take a good look at heaven as you pray: it really works!

Lesson 1 Coming To Terms With Testings

KEY VERSE: "... know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance..." James 1: 3

To begin our lessons we clarify some terms used. Understanding their meaning will greatly enhance appreciation of what the Lord has said about the testings of this life:

TRIALS*: An event in life in which a person is given two or more options, at least one of which has the approval of God. The other options - the ones which God does not approve of - lead to consequences both painful and shameful which are the result of God's judgment and wrath. That God should use our selection of these other options in a positive way is only the result of His mercy. [* When used other than in the legal sense.]

TESTS: These are the divinely appointed events - often difficult and usually associated with some pain - which God uses to purify, refine and perfect His children. They always have a good and lasting result. They may happen at the same time as the TRIAL but usually occur as a result of taking the right path during the TRIAL phase. Although TESTS seem to indicate indifference to our pain on God's part, they are far from this; they reveal His love and surgical skill in dealing with the removal of those things in our lives that will hinder our purpose and task both now and in eternity.

*It is to be noted that Bible translations are not always consistent in the way they translate these two terms, resulting in some confusion for the reader.

1. Your back in school. It's math class and the teacher is handing out a midterm exam. He has a pleasant smile on his face and is introducing the exam by explaining its positive benefits. Share with the group some of the "positive" things he might say:

- Most of us have heard a teacher make remarks about their exams with the purpose of encouraging a positive attitude on the student's part. Did you believe them; were they ever serious when they said these things? Why or why not

2. When we become adults (and sometimes even before) we start to experience "exams" but they did not come so formally and were rarely on paper. In fact sometimes it seems life in general is just one big "exam". Share with the group examples of some of life's most memorable or significant "exams".

- What do you think: Do these "exams of life" come randomly and on the basis of chance, or are they presented in a meaningful way to help and improve us? Is God responsible for them?

3. In the following passages are discussions about tests and trials. See if you can identify the nature of the particular test or trial, and what the probable result:

Scripture The Nature Of The Test Trial The Probable Outcome

Galatians 4: 13- 15

II Corinth. 12: 7- 10

Deuteronomy 13: 3

Hebrews 11: 8

4. In the following passages Tests and Trials are discussed (although the actual words may not appear). From the passage, glean the principle which the author is conveying:

- Luke 6: 48

- I Peter 4: 12,13

- I Corinthians 10: 13 (NOTE: the word for TEMPT in this passage is the very same word as TRIAL in James 1: 2.)

5. Read Deuteronomy 8: 5 and Proverbs 3: 11,12. What does the testing of the Lord tell us about the way God looks at us and how He feels about us?

6. A Time To Share and A Time To Pray...

It is so “natural” to complain about trials and tests. Yet, where would we be without them? How would we develop the godly character we need so desperately?

As you spend time in prayer with your prayer partners, consider the trial you are currently going through and see if you can come to the place where you can thank the Lord for what He is doing in you through it. God bless you as you do.

One final thought... “On that day a fountain will be opened to the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem, to cleanse them from sin and impurity... “In the whole land,” declares the LORD, “two- thirds will be struck down and perish; yet one- third will be left in it. This third I will bring into the fire; I will refine them like silver and test them like gold. They will call on my name and I will answer them; I will say, ‘They are my people,’ and they will say, ‘The LORD is our God.’” Zechariah 13: 1, 8,9

Lesson 2 The Wisdom For The Trials & Tests Of Life

KEY VERSE: “If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God...” James 1: 5

1. WISDOM. When someone speaks the word many of us conjure up the image of a Middle East sultan, dressed in robes and a turban, seated before a group of people making wise and discerning judgments among his people. Let’s see if we can enlarge this picture a little:

a. Give the names or briefly describe some contemporary individuals who demonstrate WISDOM in the way they handle their affairs and themselves. (Let’s stick to individuals now living; death is not a criteria for being considered wise!)

b. As they come to mind, share with us some of the reasons you consider the persons mentioned above as WISE:

c. What might have been some of the forces or influences that nurtured WISDOM in your selections?

2. Read I Corinthians 2: 6- 16

- What are the two types of WISDOM mentioned in this passage? (Briefly describe them as indicated by Paul.)

- Where does the worldly WISDOM come from?

- As implied by Paul, how does one go about acquiring the other (the second) kind of wisdom mentioned in this passage?

3. Read Job 28: 23; Ecclesiastes 2: 26a; Proverbs 2: 1- 8. How is WISDOM acquired?

4. As our study thus far indicates, there is more than one way to understand WISDOM. Drawing from the following verses, try to construct (in the space indicated below) a working definition of WISDOM as used in the Bible:

Proverbs 28: 26

Proverbs 3: 7

Proverbs 15: 31

Proverbs 16: 21- 23

Proverbs 19: 20

Proverbs 21: 30

NOTE: The Hebrews defined WISDOM as simply... “The application of divine truth to human experience.”

- Your working definition of WISDOM:

5. A Time To Share and A Time To Pray...

Here are two questions to consider in your prayer and share time - or you may want to spend time on them with your whole group: “Do you have the feeling or belief that you are wise?” “What do you think it will take to bring you to the point where you would feel WISE would be an appropriate description of YOU?”

Here are some action items that might help get you started on the next step toward being wise - having the gift that God wants to offer, namely WISDOM.

1. How about reading the whole book of Proverbs? 2. Done that? How about reading it backwards, verse by verse (that will sure make a person think!). 3. Select one Proverb from our lesson and commit it to memory. 4. Make a point of asking the Lord for wisdom (since it is His gift) and do that, say, at each meal time pray this week (as an easy way of remembering to ask for it). 5. See if you can find an example of a wise statement on the part of one of your co-workers, or fellow church members, and compliment them on their wisdom. (Recognition is a great way to promote it in our lives and the lives of others.)

Lesson 3 Dealing With Doubts

KEY VERSE: "... when he asks, he must believe and not doubt, because he who doubts is like a wave of the sea.." James 1: 6

The Bible has a special use for DOUBT that is not always clear because of the meaning of the English word. As we begin our lesson, we contrast the uses:

The key Biblical word for DOUBT is DIAKRINO = literally, to judge or discern between. It usually means to be caught between one of two beliefs on the same matter. When used in contrast with faith, it means to try to both believe and trust in the Lord while at the same time not believe in His love for us or have confidence in His power.

In the English language, DOUBT originally meant to waver, question or to be hesitant about something; now it most often means having a question about the honesty, integrity, or possibility of some person or event. When used with reference to God, it sometimes means an honest and sincere questioning of the why, or how, or what of God's actions. Other times it means a negative or skeptical view such as is found in our expression "I doubt that!"

1. Focusing on the English word for a moment:

a. Using the word in the negative sense (as meaning skeptical), list some things that you have DOUBTS about in this world (such as UFOs, or whatever...):

b. What is it about these things that prompts your skepticism?

c. Using the word in the positive English sense, share with us some things that you have some honest questions about, things that are

important but vague and hard to believe, things you would like someone to clear up for you some day (this can be about any topic):

2. In the following passages are examples of doubting, although the word DOUBT is not usually used. Who is doing the doubting and what kind of doubt (skepticism, honest questioning or confused wavering) is demonstrated in each case?

Genesis 15: 8

John 20: 25

Acts 12: 14,15

John 11: 38- 40

Matthew 11: 2,3

John 2: 18

3. The two following passages both contain the same word for DOUBT. [This word for DOUBT means “to stand in two ways” or “wavering as to which path to take.” - virtually the same idea expressed by the word used in our first definition.]

a. Matthew 28: 16,17. After Jesus began to appear in His resurrection body, there were certain of His followers who gathered to hear His last words - but some of them doubted. Putting yourself in their shoes, speculate as to why the DOUBTS were there - especially after all they had seen and heard about Jesus:

b. Now read Matthew 14: 27- 31. See if your group can answer the question Jesus asks Peter at the end of verse 31:

4. Read James 1: 6- 8:

a. What can happen - or not happen as the case may be - when we pray DOUBTING?

b. In light of our study, what might be some of the things we could do to help overcome the temptation to DOUBT?

5. A Time To Share and A Time To Pray...

Someday, when the Lord returns and restores all things to Himself, there will be no doubting. In fact, the “need” to doubt will itself be gone. But in the meantime, we have to deal with its appearance.

It begins as a temptation, a crossroads, an option. It can latch on to us and get a grip through the very weaknesses faith helps us to overcome.

Peter lost his footing on the water because he took his eyes - and heart - off of the Master. The same thing can happen to us. Here is a couple of ideas to keep DOUBT at bay:

1. Printed passages of scriptures in some conspicuous place to remind us of the goodness and promises of God.

2. Time out to count blessings as see the good things He has done. 3. Keeping a list of promises particularly meaningful to you as you read the Bible through.

Have some fresh ideas? Share them with your prayer partner...

Lesson 4 Acquiring The Proper Attitude Toward Acquisitions

KEY VERSE: "... The brother in humble circumstances ought to take pride in his high position... the one who is rich should take pride in his low position," Jms 1: 9,10

1. WEALTH & POVERTY. In the following questions we'll reflect on some of the ways we look at money issues in our society:

a. The artist Picasso, despairing over what he had lost when he became wealthy, once wrote: "I'd like to live like a poor man - with lots of money." What do you think he lost by becoming wealthy?

b. G. K. Chesterton, the English author and noted follower of Jesus, once observed: "The golden age [i. e., the ideal society] only comes to men when they have forgotten gold." Is he right? Must money be "forgotten" [i. e., placed on a low priority] in order for their to be real and meaningful social prosperity? Why?

c. The playwright Henrik Ibsen once wrote "Money can buy the husk of many things, but not the kernel. It can buy food, but not an appetite; medicine, but not health; acquaintances, but not friends; servants, but not faithfulness [loyalty]; days of happiness, but not peace and joy. If money cannot acquire these things, what can?

2. What, according to the Bible, are the basic dangers that accompany wealth? [Note: Some of these passages will require you to wrestle conclusions from the text.]

Deuteronomy 8: 13,14

Proverbs 28: 20

Matthew 19: 23

Mark 4: 19

Psalm 62: 9,10

3. The following passages lead us to some conclusions about what we can do to help build a proper attitude toward wealth. As you consider what the passage says, see if you can put together some themes and principles that would be appropriate to remember when working with wealth:

a. Ecclesiastes 2: 26

b. Matthew 6: 19

c. Proverbs 23: 4,5

d. I Timothy 6: 7

4. Read Matthew 19: 28,29. In this important passage the Lord Jesus explains the attitude we should have toward wealth and how the Lord is motivating His followers to maintain this attitude. (Notice with care the importance of the phrase “for my sake” in verse 29) What is this attitude and the motivation?

5. A Time To Share and A Time To Pray...

ATTITUDE: The approach we take toward a subject, issue, or person that determines the freedom with which God can accomplish His work in us. If we accept the truth of this then we can take the next step: “if a person gets his attitude toward money straight, it will help straighten out almost every other area in his life.” (Billy Graham).

Anyone wishing to serve God cannot serve the Money Master. Unless wealth is our servant, it will be our master. The Master - the Lord - teaches us that all things come from Him and that when we remember that we are mere stewards, and that wealth can so easily disappear, then we are free to use our wealth in the way in which it was intended.

In your prayer time, consider your perspective on wealth and pray as the Lord leads: 1. Do you need to give Him the ownership papers to your wealth? 2. Have you been obeying Him in the area of generosity to the poor, to the needy, to the cause of Christ, to...? 3. Have you made an effort to see that your riches are “stored in heaven”? 4. Do you have a clear conscience about how you have used your wealth?

Lesson 5 Understanding & Dealing With Temptation

KEY VERSE: "... each one is tempted when, by his own evil desire, he is dragged away and enticed. ," Jms 1: 14

1. Temptation. The English word "TEMPT" can be a little confusing for people trying to learn our language. We often use it in a negative sense, meaning some sort of invitation or enticement to do what is unwise, evil or immoral, but we also use it to mean to entice to do good: "It was a terrific book, tempting me to read page after page!"

a. Share some of the things in our culture that encourage us (i. e., entice us, tempt us with evil intent) to be foolish...

b. That encourage us to be immoral....

c. What are some of the things that tempt us to do that which is good?

2. Read Matthew 4: 1- 11. The Lord Jesus experienced temptation in a very direct way during His stay on Earth.

a. Concerning what items was Jesus TEMPTED? Were any of these bad or immoral in themselves?

b. What enticement did the heavenly Father offer for Jesus to do good instead of evil i DURING the temptation?

c. What preparation do you think was involved to enable Jesus to resist the temptation to do evil and respond to the temptation to do good? Was there anything in this story to indicate any immediate preparation that Jesus went through?

3. What level and type of preparation do you feel would be necessary for you to take God's way instead of Satan's had you been offered the things mentioned in the temptation of the Lord?

4. The Lord Jesus experienced many other temptations during His stay on Earth. What do the following passages tell us about His temptation?

Hebrews 2: 18

Hebrews 4: 15

Hebrews 5: 1,2

Luke 22: 24- 31 [NOTE: The key word is TEMPT in verse 28, sometimes translated "trial."]

5. The following passages offer some more clues to dealing with temptation. See what strategies you are able to identify:

a. Romans 12: 21

b. I Peter 5: 8,9

c. Hebrews 12: 3,4

5. A Time To Share and A Time To Pray...

PREPARATION. The key to our response to temptation is to be prepared in advance before it comes. Jesus knew that He was about to be tempted (apparently the Father told Him, or He was warned in some other way) and made Himself ready.

Are you about to face temptation? Are you ready? With your prayer partner - before you pray - share some of the things that you do to prepare for that inevitable bout of temptation before it comes. They will be helped and encouraged as you do...

Lesson 6 Experience the Fact That God Is Good

KEY VERSE: “. Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father...” James 1: 17

GOOD. We use this word in many ways in our language. In fact there are no less than 50 uses recorded in the Random House Unabridged Dictionary. Thus, when we hear, read or use GOOD with reference to people or God, it is a challenge to understand or communicate its precise meaning.

1. Through the questions in this sections we begin to discover, first, just why GOODNESS is so significant:

a. “Nolan Ryan is a good baseball player.” What do you think is meant by the use of GOOD in this sentence? [In your group, come up with some descriptive phrases that would parallel the use here.]

b. “Little Timmy was so good for me while you were away at the store!” What do you think it means here?

c. “Sam, you’re such a good husband; you’re so good to me.” And what do you think it means here?

2. The Bible reveals that God is GOOD. But what does this mean? In the following passages are helpful insights into the goodness of God. If possible, identify the contribution made by each:

Nahum 1: 7 God is GOOD because:

Psalm 25: 7,8 God is GOOD because:

Psalm 119: 68 God is GOOD because:

Genesis 1: 3,4 God is GOOD because:

3. Read Matthew 19: 16,17 and Romans 3: 10- 12. The Bible tells us that God is GOOD but it also gives us some understanding of just how good God really is. In your group summarize the message of these two passages:

4. As result of the goodness of God, certain things take place - or ought to take place - in this world. From the following verses, identify the results of God's goodness:

James 1: 17

Psalm 107: 8,9

Micah 6: 8

5. If God is the only one who is really GOOD, and yet He asks man to be GOOD and to even imitate Himself (Ephesians 5: 1) how does mankind learn to become GOOD like God?

5. A Time To Share and A Time To Pray...

A. W. Tozer in his famous essay on God, *The Knowledge Of The Holy*, defines the goodness of God this way: “The goodness of God is that which disposes Him to be kind, cordial, benevolent, and full of good will toward men. He is tenderhearted and of quick sympathy, and His unfailing attitude toward all moral beings is open, frank, and friendly. By His nature He is inclined to bestow blessedness and He takes holy pleasure in the happiness of His people... The goodness of God is the drive behind all blessings He daily bestows upon us. God created us because He felt good in His heart and he redeemed us for the same reason.”

With your prayer partner (s), read over the above definition and extract at least one thought that is new and attractive to you and ask the Lord to help you move ahead in embracing it for your very own...

Lesson 7 Lessons On Anger

KEY VERSE: “. man’s anger does not bring about the righteous life that God desires.” James 1: 20

[There are basically two kinds of anger in the human experience and both of these are described and demonstrated in the Bible. One is THUMOS, or the hot flaming reactive anger. It flashes up and is soon gone. The other is ORGAY, the more settled and determined anger, sometimes called “wrath.” This kind of anger usually comes on slowly and leaves slowly. Our discussion focuses on the control of “wrath.”]

1. Most will agree that that losing one’s temper - letting it get out of control - is not a wise thing to do. How does the loss of one’s temper effect the world around us? The next few questions prepare us for studying some things God says about lost temper:

a. Take a few moments and share a memorable experience in which you saw someone lose their temper. [CAUTION: Please avoid personal references unless the individual displayed their temper in public.]

b. How did the witnesses to this temper loss respond? Did the responses vary depending on the individual witness?

c. How did the temper loss effect you personally?

2. **WHAT DO YOU THINK:** Is it possible to lose your temper and not injure the person toward whom it is directed?

3. In the Bible we read that God becomes angry - wrathful. In the following passages are examples of God's anger as He expresses it. From the evidence bellow, try to determine 1) the reason for His anger, 2) the way he expresses His anger, and 3) if God ever loses His temper in these situations:

Numbers 32: 7- 14:

Deuteronomy 32: 21- 29:

II Kings 22: 13:

Ezekiel 5: 13- 15:

Romans 1: 18- 19:

Revelation 19: 14- 16:

4. Drawing from the verses and your responses in the previous question, give some indication as to why you think God gets angry:

- In the course of our day to day events, we all experience personal anger. Do we do so for the same kind of reasons that God gets angry?

5. In an effort to help people keep their anger under control, the Lord gives some spiritual handles by which we can "reign it in". In your group, see if you can draw some spiritual helps from the following passages:

James 1: 19 My dear brothers, take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry, 20 for man's anger does not bring about the righteous life that God desires.

Proverbs 22: 24 Do not make friends with a hot-tempered man, do not associate with one easily angered, 25 or you may learn his ways and get yourself ensnared.

Psalms 39: 1... I said, "I will watch my ways and keep my tongue from sin; I will put a muzzle on my mouth as long as the wicked are in my presence." 2 But when I was silent and still, not even saying anything good, my anguish increased. 3 My heart grew hot within me, and as I meditated, the fire burned; then I spoke with my tongue: 4 "Show me, O LORD, my life's end and the number of my days; let me know how fleeting is my life.... 7 "But now, Lord, what do I look for? My hope is in you. 8 Save me from all my transgressions; do not make me the scorn of fools.

Ephesians 4: 25 Therefore each of you must put off falsehood and speak truthfully to his neighbor, for we are all members of one body. 26 "In your anger do not sin": Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry, 27 and do not give the devil a foothold.

7. Describe the experience of having your spirit and emotions under control when you are involved in a difficult, pressured situation. Do you sense that God is there with you?

8. A Time To Share and A Time To Pray...

It is very difficult for humans to admit that they are angry and that they are sinning as they get angry. There is just so much justifying of anger in these days: there are many who try to excuse their expressions of anger as “normal” or “healthy.” But they are just rationalizations. Many people internalize their anger and so destroy themselves with this powerful emotion.

What’s the answer? More than can be said here, but one direction the scriptures point is to the fact that God knows how to get angry in just the right way and He is the only one with enough accurate information - and the correct motive - to carry out anger in a just and righteous manner. It seems we should leave more in His hands than we now do. With your prayer partner, take a few moments to turn the objects of your anger into His hands...

Lesson 8 What About Widows & Orphans

KEY VERSE: "... look after orphans and widows in their distress ." James 1: 27b

What is a widow? A woman whose husband has died (or disappeared) and who has a family unable or unwilling to care for her needs.

What is an orphan? In both the Old and New Testaments, the orphan was a fatherless child. (A child without both parents, siblings or grandparents is very rare in Biblical times.)

1. Are there any widows in your extended family? Share with your responses to the following...

a. What are some of the emotional needs of a recent widow? A long time widow?:

b. What are some of their financial or material needs??

c. What kinds of spiritual needs do widows encounter?

2. With reference to the previous question, do the needs of the orphan differ

3. The word "love" appears more than 600 times in the Bible and is the focus of all the benevolent acts of both God and man. Love is really

important stuff! In the following passages are examples of little or step by step acts of love that are vital to the emotional and spiritual health of

our world. In each passage, try to identify the little acts or steps of love that we are to take:

John 14: 15,23

Ephesians 5: 1,2

Colossians 3: 14

Luke 7: 47

Ephesians 4: 2,32

I John 4: 16

4. From your memory of the New Testament histories of the life of Christ, list at least three examples of little things that Jesus did to show his love. (You have the opportunity to decide what is “little”.)

5. Read I Thessalonians 2: 7- 12. Given the word picture Paul uses in this passage, what kinds of acts do you suspect Paul performed in his treatment of his fellow Christians in this city? What do you think was the response by the Christians?

6. A Time To Share and A Time To Pray...

Little acts of love together usually carry more weight than one or two big acts of love. It is strangely similar to the sandblaster: lots of little acts

of love remove the corruption - the rust and corrosion of life - and leave the object itself unharmed. Or one bucket of water can kill the plant, but lots of drops can sustain it.

Rather than the focus on the dramatic or the single act of love, would we not better serve those we love by giving them a constant flow of love, however small those many acts may be?

In your prayer time, consider together with your partner(s) some of the things you could do to make a difference in your world through little acts of love...

Lesson 9 Getting A Handle On Prejudice

KEY VERSE: “To show partiality in judging is not good...” Proverbs 24: 24a

1. Prejudice: Few people would admit that they hold a prejudicial attitude toward someone or something. We would all like to think we are more fair minded than that. But prejudice exists, and often it is subtle and hard to detect. The following questions get us started in identifying prejudice...

a. It has been said that... “Prejudice is a great time saver: it enables you to form opinions without bothering to get the facts.” Is that what is meant by prejudice? [Elaborate.] If not, what is it?

b. Toward what have you seen prejudice exhibited?

c. Most of the time we are aroused by prejudice against a person, creed, idea, sect, or the like. But, is it possible to have prejudicial favor toward something? If so, give an example:

d. This will take a measure of transparency on everyone’s part, but it is an important question: can you share any prejudices you have had or currently have. [Note: It is not our purpose as a group to solve everyone’s prejudices here. The important thing is to be open and honest about them. Give the members of your group plenty of freedom to share without being judgmental.]

2. Read Matthew 22: 15- 17. In this well known story, we learn something about the way Jesus approached prejudicial decision making...

- How is Jesus characterized in this passage with reference to prejudice?
- Who were the people making this evaluation? His friends? His enemies?
- Although they seem to be trying to trick Jesus, nevertheless they seem quite sincere about their evaluation of Him. Think of some modern figure [not of your church fellowship] about whom you have the same regard:

3. Read John 4: 4- 19,25- 30. Rather than argue about prejudice, it seemed to be the strategy of the Master to take a very different route. This story from His life is a classic example of His unique but effective approach:

- What was the typical attitude of the Jew toward the Samaritan? How did the Master respond to this prejudice?
- What was the attitude toward women in that day? How did the Master respond?
- What would you imagine the attitude of the people to be toward a woman of such loose moral character as that described in this story? How did the Master respond?

4. In the following passages are some clues on how to begin to walk in the footsteps of Jesus with reference to avoiding prejudice...

- Deuteronomy 19: 15. What is to be avoided? Practiced?

- Romans 10: 12. How are the various families of mankind to be viewed?

- Acts 10: 34,35. What is God's perspective on mankind?

5. A Time To Share and A Time To Pray...

The pattern of prejudice is one that persists for generations; every family of mankind has its own bias and finds it difficult to get past it [them]. How they arise, or even how they are transmitted pales in comparison with the need to rid ourselves of them. They are a constant battle.

Recently the temptation is to not only end prejudice, but end justice and any righteous judgment. ["Don't lay your guilt trip on me!" they say, or, "You can't legislate morality - especially mine!" Of course we can, and must if murder, sexual immorality, etc. and a hundred other crimes of consequence are to be at least hindered.] Somewhere between prejudice on one side and letting everyone do their own thing on the other stands godliness. It is a place to be searched out and found.

Where do we begin? Start with something you know is already the object of the Spirit's conviction. If you can, share it, pray concerning it, at work

through it with another loving brother or sister. God will bless you as you do...

Lesson 10 Finding The Motivation To Obey

KEY VERSE: "... the law that gives freedom..." James 2: 12

1. Our growing up years varied widely in how we experienced them, but virtually all of us can relate to being asked by a parent to perform a task - let's say, taking out the garbage or cleaning up your room, and reacting by saying to ourselves something like, "I really don't want to do THAT right now!" The following questions explore this attitude...

a. Looking back on it, what do you think led to a negative response to the request (order)? Was it just tone of voice, or was there more?

b. How did the quality of your relationship with the one making the request (order) influence your response?

c. Picture this: it is a week before your wedding & your mate- to- be asked you to take out the garbage. Describe your response. Was it different from the ones you described above? Why?

2. Read Matthew 21: 28- 32. [Please use the NIV translation for this episode. The wording in the KJV and NASB is different although the substance and point of the story is identical.] The story of the two sons tell a very important lesson about the Lord's - and man's - appreciation of obedience... • Place yourself in the shoes of the first son. Why do you think he said "No!" at the start? Speculate as to why he changed his mind:

- Now place yourself in the shoes of the second son. Why do you think he said “Yes!” at the start? Do you think he changed his mind or was it his plan to disobey from the start? In other words, did he lie to his father?

- What was the real difference between the two sons?

- The Lord Jesus likens those who are being saved to one of the sons and expresses his approval. Which son, and, why the approval?

3. In the following passages, with your group’s help, try to identify that which the Lord does to MOTIVATE or ENABLE we humans to obey Him:

James 1: 25

John 15: 10

John 14: 23

Joshua 1: 8

Ephesians 5: 5- 7

4. The following passage is the classic on obedience. From the Lord’s dramatic choice of a parable, we can conclude that He gives it a very high priority and that He is motivated to have us obey because it is absolutely the best for us...

Luke 6: 46 “Why do you call me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ and do not do what I say? 47 I will show you what he is like who comes to me and hears my words and puts them into practice. 48 He is like a man building a house, who dug down deep and laid the foundation on rock. When a flood came, the torrent struck that house but could not shake it, because it was well built. 49 But the one who hears my words and does not put them into practice is like a man who built a house on the ground without a foundation. The moment the torrent struck that house, it collapsed and its destruction was complete.”

- What is the “rock” in this story equivalent to? The “sand”? The “flood”?

5. From what we have learned in our lesson, how significant is the relationship with the one being obeyed as to whether we exercise sincere and voluntary obedience toward their requests (orders)? Do you see a relationship between a person’s relationship with God and the level of their obedience?

6. A Time To Share and A Time To Pray...

Obedience is a word that raises the hackles of many people in this independent, self- absorbed culture of ours. (Evidence? When was the last time you heard “love, honor and OBEY” in any dramatized wedding in the media?) But in a family, obedience is vital: the parents set the direction for the children that often have no idea what problems, dangers and needs they may be encountering. God designed man to live like a family with Himself at the head. He is the ONLY one that knows best, and he wrote the rule book. (He is the President, Congress and Supreme Court all rolled into one!)

Is obedience important? Of course! Do we struggle with it? Naturally! That is why He has provided an array of motivational tools to help us stay on track: love, rewards, family support, a guiding Holy Spirit, consequences, promises, examples of success & failure in the Bible, prayer, clear instructions, faith, etc.

Is there an area of obedience in which you are presently struggling? Have you used the tools He has provided? Can you identify one you might put into action? Share with your prayer partner as you are led by Him. The Lord will surely bless as you respond to Him...

Lesson 11 Using the Power Of The Tongue For The Good

KEY VERSE: “Never let evil talk pass your lips say only the good things men need to hear, things that will really help them.” Ephesians 4: 29

1. Here is a situation that will be the focus of our questions in this section:

It was a family reunion and a number of relatives had gathered, including your older sister. Your sister was the one that provoked a lot of fighting and quarreling between you growing up, and still seems to be at it: she makes a cutting remark in front of the family about your appearance - among other things. Two weeks later, your brother calls and asks how things are going between you and your sister...

a. What would you do? (circle as many as apply) 1. Tell him everything is fine. 2. Tell him all about what she said and how hurt you are. 3. Say nothing at all. 4. Pretend nothing happened. 5. Politely put off your brother until you have had a chance to discuss the matter and your feelings with your sister, then tell him about the situation. 6. Same as 5. but do not discuss it with him later.

b. If you have the freedom to do so, share a reason why you made the choice you did in the previous question:

c. What might be the possible impact on the relationship between your brother and sister if you chose #2?

2. Read James 4: 11,12 & Ephesians 5: 29- 32 . How do these passages guide us in responding to each of the following?...

- In what ways are we limited in our communication with others?

- In what ways are we permitted to be critical* of others - especially fellow Christians?

*The dictionary defines critical as “looking for faults”; criticism as “a remark pointing out a fault”; critic as “one who finds fault with something.”

- Give examples of comments that “build up” others:

- Give examples of comments that are the opposite of “building up” others:

3. In the following passages, there are principles that guide us in our practical discourse with others, principles that help us to build up rather than do the opposite:

Matthew 12: 36

Proverbs 18: 8

Proverbs 16: 28

Psalm 141: 3

x

4.

5. A Time To Share and A Time To Pray...

Lesson 12 Getting Back Control Of The Tongue

KEY VERSE: “Never let evil talk pass your lips say only the good things men need to hear, things that will really help them.” Ephesians 4: 29

1. To the United States Constitution there has been added a Bill of Rights in which certain civil liberties have been promised by law. One of these liberties (the 1st Amendment) promises that “Congress shall make no law... abridging the freedom of speech...” The following questions deal with this promise:

a. What types of speech should this amendment be understood as permitting? What types are prohibited, that is, are such things as lies, slander, prohibited?

b. Do you feel that certain kinds of speech (i. e., certain words under certain circumstances) should be abolished as a matter of law? If so, can you give some examples of the type of things our government should protect us from?

c. Do you think the government should protect us from gossip, rumors, and whispering? In other words, should the kinds of things seen so often on the covers of those tabloids in the grocery store be declared unlawful?

2. The Bible has some very strong things to say about the dangers of certain types of speech and what to do about protecting oneself from its damaging effects. In the following small sampling of dozens of such passages, identify the dangerous types of speech and the preventatives indicated. (Be sure to first read the reference definitions of the Bible words, below, before beginning.):

The Dangerous Type of Speech Preventative

Proverbs 20: 19

Proverbs 11: 13

Proverbs 11: 12 (NIV)

II Corinthians 12: 19- 21

Proverbs 16: 28,24

Reference definitions: GOSSIP = A statement at least partially based on fact which casts another person in a bad light; a secret revealed. (This is different from a LIE which casts a person in a bad light with untruths.)
 TALEBEARER = A person who spreads a story to others, a story which (though often true) casts another in a bad light. MALICIOUS GOSSIP = one who gossips with the intention of hurting the feelings or reputation of others.

3. What does one do to get ones speech back into control? The Bible has certain very definite guidelines that put us back on track:

a. Read Colossians 4: 5,6 and Ecclesiastes 10: 12. What elements must be provided in order to have the appropriate verbal response in a given situation?

b. Where does grace come from? Is it manufactured by men? Is it deserved?

c. If we wanted grace - or more grace - for our speech, what must we do?

4. Read Proverbs 12: 18. Once we understand the great truth of the previous question (# 3 above), we must be introduced to two additional truths, truths found in this Proverbs passage (and in many other places for that matter). In your own words, identify these two truths and give an example of how they might be applied in everyday speech:

5. A Time To Share and A Time To Pray...

It is a temptation to ask that the government outlaw all forms of evil speech. The problem is that they may call the kind of speech you use “evil” such as sharing your faith with another. In that case, free speech becomes very valuable. But how do we then begin to resolve the problem of wicked speech?

We have certain laws that limit out and out lies (as, for example, perjury) but when it comes to using the truth or half truths for wicked purposes, there really are few laws to protect us. That is when the unique Christian life style becomes important: only by example can we expect to win over others to embrace a lifestyle that includes positive speech. Gossip, negative criticism, talebearing and the like are expressly forbidden in the scriptures. In fact, they are classified with sins like adultery and murder in terms of their seriousness and effect.

Are there examples of these dangerous forms of speech in your life?
Would you like to help set the world the vital example for good,
upbuilding speech? Pray as the Lord leads in this matter...

Lesson 13 On Detecting True & False Wisdom

KEY VERSE: “Who is wise and understanding among you? Let him show it ...” James 3: 13

WISDOM: The Bible teaches that there are two types of wisdom, one that takes God’s principles, values and perspective into account, and one that does not. The Bible defines wisdom as a knowledge and respect for God’s word, and a life that is sincerely lived according to its standard.

1. As we begin this week’s lesson, we take a look at wisdom in the world immediately around us. Have several offer their suggestion as to a possible answer to the following:

a. Using one or two word definitions, give some of the characteristics that distinguish the wise person in our present world:

b. Among those that qualify as your personal friends and acquaintances (but excluding the people in your group) who is the wisest?

b. Among the people living today, who seems to be the wisest to you?

2. James (in 3: 13- 17) says that there are two kinds of wisdom, one from the earth and the other from heaven. In the following passages are some clues as to how to detect the wisdom that comes from Heaven. Describe these clues in the space provided [Note: this is only a small sample of an incredible number of such passages and clues. Those listed seem to this author especially important in our present culture]:

Proverbs 10: 19

Proverbs 13: 10

Job 28: 28

Proverbs 12: 5

Philippians 4: 8

James 3: 17

3. The following are statements made by individuals said to be wise by the standard of public opinion. As your group reads them, as you have freedom to do so, offer your opinion as to the type or kind of wisdom each seems to contain:

a. "The world is a vast temple dedicated to Discord." VOLTAIRE

b. "... it is much more safe to be feared than to be loved, when you have to chose between the two." MACHIAVELLI

c. "... that which is the most awful of evils - death - is nothing to us, since when we exist there is no death, and when there is death we do not exist."
EPICURUS

d. “God created man, but I could do better.” ERMA BOMBECK

4. Many of the more reflective and spiritually sensitive leaders and educators in our culture are alarmed about the lack of moral and relational wisdom* among young people today. Why do you think there is seemingly so little wisdom today? In helping us respond to this question, we consider the influence of several factors. Comment on the influence of the following:

a. Wisdom as taught or demonstrated in our schools...

b. Wisdom shared at family gatherings...

c. Wisdom demonstrated on television and the media...

* By moral and relation wisdom: such things as taking responsibility for personal sin, discernment between right and wrong, developing and practicing strategies for self- control, exercising practical compassion, etc.

5. A Time To Share and A Time To Pray...

Solomon said “Wisdom is the principle thing... whatever you do get wisdom.” To “have” wisdom means to say or do that which God would do if He had your circumstances. James put it this way: “Who is wise and understanding among you? Let him show it by his good life, by deeds done in the humility that comes from wisdom.” (... our key verse for this lesson.)

Putting wisdom to good use also means figuring out which information, or which advice, or which example or model is the one we can confidently respond to. As in James 3: 17, the passage we looked at in question 2,

there are certain characteristics that distinguish godly wisdom from an earth-based, limited wisdom. We can ask ourselves some questions related to these that will help us “look before we leap” - a “leap” that can end in disaster.

With your prayer partner, do a little “wisdom check” in your life, and among your influences and pray as the Lord leads...

Lesson 14 What God Has To Say About Quarreling

KEY VERSE: “What causes fights and quarrels among you? Don’t they come from your desires that battle within you?” James 4: 1

1. Think back to a memorable quarrel that you had sometime in the past, perhaps one at school with a friend. In the following questions, use the friction you had with your friend as a model for understanding what happens in a quarrel:

a. Looking back on past strife, what were the most common reasons for quarrels between you & your friends?

b. Did the quarrels of your childhood usually start because the other person - your friend - was fault?

c. Who usually brought the quarrel to an end, you, your friends, or...?

d. Describe your heart during the time of the quarreling: Were you angry? Were you sad? Disheartened? Confused? Lonely? Vengeful? Or...? If it was more than one of these, try to describe a percentage of each (such as, “40% angry, 60% sad,” or whatever proportions seems correct to you.)

2. In the following are some of the things that are the occasion for quarreling as described in the Bible. Try to identify these circumstances as specifically as the passages permit:

Proverbs 13: 10

Proverbs 26: 20,21

II Timothy 2: 14

Psalm 140: 1,2

Titus 3: 9

Proverbs 20: 3

3. Read Acts 15: 36- 41. In this episode in the life of the early church, a quarrel broke out and brought division. In the following questions you will be asked to analyze this event:

a. From what you have read in this story, what was the occasion for the strife?

b. From the information given in Acts, who seems to be at fault here?

c. These men were disciples and very important individuals in the establishing of early church. Would it therefore be correct for us to conclude that what each of them did in this episode was good and right? Why or why not?

d. Read Colossians 4: 10 [NOTE: This event occurred after the Acts passage, above.] What do you suppose brought about the change in Paul's attitude?

4. Read James 4: 1- 3.

a. What does James say is at the root of all quarreling?

b. What change in point of view does he say will help limit the breadth and duration of such strife?

c. What do you think: Is it God's will for Christians to quarrel? Is it God's will for non- Christians to quarrel? Is quarreling EVER something that God wills for us to do?

5. A Time To Share and A Time To Pray...

People have always quarreled. The fact that they do in no way legitimizes quarreling. In fact, it only proves how vital it is for us to face and deal with it.

But how? Some respond to the challenge of a quarrel by giving up and always being the loser ("OK," they say, "We'll do it your way.") Others give up verbally but inwardly are angry - even hostile or bitter. Others try to just walk away, but in their heart they have not avoided it. Others argue that they are only human, and go on with quarreling hoping that God will forgive them when it is all over. Still others believe that since they are "right" then that somehow allows them to quarrel. All of these are mere excuses or rationalizations.

We quarrel because of the desires of our flesh, and we attempt to excuse it because of our pride. Quarrels begin because we forget God; they are let lose because we forget to love others as we would ourselves.

Our concluding assignment for this lesson is not an easy one. For some it will be the most difficult of all assignments: Can you agree with God that quarreling is sin? That's what the Bible says it is. Are you willing to say, "God I confess that my quarreling - whether I started it or not - is sin." With your prayer partner see if you are ready to take this first step. God will surely bless you as you do.

Lesson 15 The Strategy To End Quarreling: Humility

KEY VERSE: “Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will lift you up.” James 4: 10

HUMILITY: A character trait in which a person develops a completely accurate view of himself - especially concerning his sense of self worth, his sinfulness, his wisdom - as he stands before God & others.

HUMILIATION: A feeling of worthlessness or disgrace imposed on one person by another.

1. Humility. Most of us value the quality in a person which, when communicated to us, says, “You are certainly my equal and, in many ways, my better.” We do not feel like we have to be in control with such a person, and we feel like we can trust a person who automatically respects us (though we certainly don’t often deserve such unqualified respect!) With the wonderful quality of Biblical humility in mind, answer the following in your group:

a. Are there many truly humble people (as defined Biblically, above) in your immediate world? Why or why not?

b. Is humility something a person is born with, or is it learned - or is it both?

c. How does a person go about learning humility? How do YOU learn humility?

d. Describe one example of a situation in which you were given some genuine help in learning humility.

2. Humble people in the Bible: From your recollection of Bible characters, name a person (other than Jesus, Moses or Paul - they're all too obvious) that seems humble to you, and why you selected them...

3. Read Micah 6: 8 and Isaiah 57: 15. Just how important is humility in God's scheme of things here on this earth?

4. In the following passages we are given some of the principles related to humility - its meaning, importance, and development in the hearts of people. See if you can describe what they each have to say about humility in a single sentence, but in your own words:

Proverbs 22: 4

James 4: 10, I Peter 5: 5

Proverbs 11: 2

Proverbs 16: 18

Philippians 2: 3

Matthew 18: 1- 4

5. There are many situations in the Bible that were turned into quarrels because of pride or in which quarrels were avoided because of humility. In

the following passages try to identify the individual, the situation and whether a quarrel was averted or caused by that individual...

a. Exodus 5: 2...

b. Daniel 5: 23

c. Matthew 15: 22- 28

d. Matthew 8: 8

6. A Time To Share and A Time To Pray...

Quarrels break out because of our sinful nature (as we discovered in our last lesson). Quarreling is sin. At the base of all sin is pride. It is therefore not surprising that the answer to quarreling that God gives us is “Humble yourselves.”

The early Christians called this “the highest of all virtues” (see the writings of Augustine of Hippo and others) because it had the greatest effect for good of any of the character qualities of Christ. We seem to know this as if it were written into our hearts, but instead of practicing

humility or encouraging it in others, we have simply neglected it. Or worse yet, we try to use humiliation as the tool to prompt humility instead of MODELING of humility, that which initiates and nurtures true humility.

One writer on this subject put it this way (if we may paraphrase him):
“Humility is acquired only if we ourselves come to see our sins for what

they are before God. When we see the shame of them and then maintain the memories of these as a “Hall of Shame,” a place of remembrance and not a place where we live, we maintain a proper perspective. This is true humility.”

Are you experiencing true humility? Talk about this with your prayer partner and then pray as the Lord leads...

Lesson 16 Providing For Problems While Planning

KEY VERSE: “If it is the Lord’s will, we will live and do this or that.”

James 4: 13

1. PLANNING FOR A RAINY DAY. Most of have had an encounter with a “struggle” or “problem” or an “accident” that interrupts the flow of our plans. The nature of these interrupts can vary in levels as to seriousness (i. e., the amount of time, money, or, people involved) and intensity (i. e., as to the pain they actually inflict). The following questions asks us to explore these*:

a. Describe an activity you and your family or friends were involved with that was “interrupted” by an unexpected event, perhaps tragic in nature:

b. What were some of the emotions that touched the group that you were with at that time?

c. As time passed, how did you come to view the interruption? Do you now see it as a good thing? A bad thing? Or...?

d. Contrast your feelings (above) with those stemming from another kind of interruption, one that turned out to be, as you saw it, a good thing (i. e., a surprise birthday party, or unexpectedly finding a misplaced check for no small amount of money, or running into an old friend while rushing to an appointment etc.).

* It was suggested by the editing crew that the author - yours truly - leave in the three mistakes he made in the original of this lesson question to demonstrate just how much of an interruption or “problem” a fault generated event - the unexpected - can create.

2. Read Genesis 3: 16- 19. Because Adam and Eve disobeyed God, God said that He would send certain painful “interruptions” into Adams activities and plans during the years ahead. Briefly describe these various “interruptions”:

3. Read Romans 8: 18- 21. In this passage, the Apostle Paul expands on the whole idea of painful “interruptions” to our desires and plans. What does he say is taking place when the unwanted comes?

- Will this situation always prevail; will things always be this way?

4. The Bible teaches us that we can expect the seemingly unexpected in the day to day situations of our lives. In fact, the Bible teaches that we can prepare for the unexpected - even plan for it! In the following passages we are given important guidelines for disaster preparedness. In your group, try to summarize the guideline into a few words:

Proverbs 6: 6- 8

Romans 5: 3- 5

Hebrews 12: 1- 3

Hebrews 12: 10,11

Genesis 45: 4- 7

Philippians 4: 4- 8

James 4: 15,17

Proverbs 16: 3

5. In light of the passages we have studied in this lesson, offer three or four insights on the subject of planning for the future that would be profitable for a young person in the following situation:

Your young person is about to take a trip to the next state to go to work the entire summer for a relative. He/ she is desiring to save enough money to go to school back at home for the following school year. It is possible to actually save enough to do this, but it will be tight...

6. A Time To Share and A Time To Pray...

Effective, appropriate planning involves many elements. We need good goals in order to create good plans. We need to take the adequate amount of time, and seek wise counsel as we plan. But more often than not we are likely to idealize our goals and plans and not prepare for three things that are most often left out: adequate personal consultation with God, appropriate accounting of sin and its consequences on the outcome (it will undoubtedly mean we will have to be flexible), and understand and accept

the cost and sacrifice - the “pain” - that comes when we carry out our plan.

In one of the trades there is a proverb that goes something like this: “Once you have made your best estimate as to what it will take to do the job, double it, add 10% and then you’ll come up with the real final figure.” Some find this to be too difficult to accept: “That’s too negative, too pessimistic.” Others give up: “That’s too expensive, too costly.” Having been in this trade in the past, this author can assure the reader that it is an amazingly accurate proverb.

The same is true for good planning in general: God’s will always takes into account sin and sacrifice. Are you making some plans right now that are significant to you but which have not included the influence of sin and sacrifice? Take time with your prayer partner to work through asking God to help you take them into account right now...

- Read Proverbs 11: 12; 10: 19; 13: 3. What does the Bible say about the general use of this technique, the one used by Jesus, explored in part #1 of this question?

3. Read Ecclesiastes 5: 1,2; Proverbs 28: 9; 25: 12. Learning to say only the good things that help people requires discipline of our heart - our human spirit; for any godly character quality to become a part of our life involves practice and the work of the Holy Spirit. In these passages is another such spiritual discipline.

a. What is this discipline?

b. Why do you think the work of the Holy Spirit would be necessary to make this discipline a part of our inner person, our heart?

4. There are many principles and disciplines that help prepare us for following the command we have in the Bible that says:

Ephesians 4: 29 Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen.

In the following passages try to identify those principles and disciplines:

Proverbs 23: 22

Proverbs 15: 28

Proverbs 15: 23

Psalm 52: 4- 7

Psalm 64: 2- 8

Ecclesiastes 11: 12,13,20

James 4: 11

5. As we have seen in this lesson thus far, the Bible puts tremendous emphasis on saying things that build up people - whoever they are. Even when we are confronting people with their sin we are to use the following guidelines, ones Paul used whenever he shared the Gospel with others:

“Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone.” Colossians 4: 6

What might be some of the ways we could carry out this directive, that is, always letting our conversation be “full of grace” when we encounter others who may not agree with us? How about those that are brothers/sisters?

6. A Time To Share and A Time To Pray...

All of us have said something we did not mean and then complain to ourselves about the fine “mess” we made after it was all over. Sometimes the “mess” begins with us getting angry or frustrated, or sometimes it is because we have poor information to go on and make poor decisions, or sometimes we say the wrong thing and can think of no reason at all as to why we said it.

The important thing is that if we are to be the kind of people God wants us to be, it isn't going to come naturally. It will take a work of God. We will have to work at it within the power of His might. We will need that stuff called grace, which comes by asking for it, by prayer.

And this is the point of our lesson: if we want to truly obey Him and speak only good to our neighbor, we must pause that brief moment before we speak - every time we speaking, and get God's guidance and strength. That brief moment will mean the difference between God's will and our natural will being expressed. With your prayer partner, take a few moments to talk about making a commitment to talk with the master each time before you speak and see if you are at the point where you can make that commitment to him. Surely, if the Bible is at all true you will be blessed if you make it...

Lesson 18 Making Special Promises

KEY VERSE: "... let your "yes" mean "yes" and your "no" mean "no"...
James 5: 11

1. Broken Promises. You have just loaned some money to an old friend who seemed to be in need. The day of promised return payment arrives, but there is no sign of the money. Your phone calls don't get through to him at the office and he never seems to be at home. Several weeks go by and you still have not heard from him. Putting the financial side of the issue aside for a moment, consider the following questions:

- a. Be as realistic as you can: what kind of emotional/ psychological response do you think you would have if you were the one loaning the money in this story?

 - b. Talk about what may be happening in the head/ heart of the loanee in our story?

 - c. Would the reactions of the two parties change if the amount were \$5.00? If it were \$500.00? If it were \$50,000.00?
2. Read Hebrews 6: 16,17. According to this passage, what is the purpose of an oath? Did God use it (the oath) for the same reason?
3. Read Genesis 20: 1- 14 and 21: 22- 24. In this story we have an example of a typical oath being requested and offered. The following questions ask us to examine the message behind these events...

- a. What did Abraham do to King Abimelech that prompted the King to extract the oath mentioned in chapter 21?

- b. It can be easily argued that Abraham told the truth to the King. Was Abraham, therefore, actually guilty of anything? If so, just what - exactly?

- c. What happens to our stature or reputation when we do what Abraham did?

- d. What do you think: does an oath like the one given by Abraham help the situation? Does it make things “better”?

- e. What do you think: how often should such oaths as these be used?

4. In the following passages are instructions as to how to go about declaring and using oaths and vows in day to day life. In your group, try to come up with one or more guidelines as suggested by each passage:

Mark 6: 22- 26

Matthew 5: 33

Proverbs 20: 25

Psalm 15: 4

Psalm 66: 13,14

Ecclesiastes 5: 4

Ecclesiastes 5: 5

Ecclesiastes 5: 6

James 5: 12

5. From what we have studied thus far, in your group suggest some possible examples of vows we might offer to the Lord in our day:

6. A Time To Share and A Time To Pray...

Vows and oaths have a rich history in Old and New Testament times. They helped establish transactions between men and between God and men on firmer footings; promises build trust.

But like the surgeons scalpel, oaths and vows are dangerous when they are abused: they are so simple and easy to use, yet can release fearful death and destruction. To misuse a vow is to possibly turn the course of ones life in a very unfavorable direction; to use it properly is to open the possibility of rich blessing from God.

The Bible's message to us is clear: use vows, but use them with care. Reserve them for times when they are needed and sincerely expressed.

Is there an area in your life that needs a sacred promise? How about Bible reading? Prayer? Giving or tithing? Marital recommitment? Evangelism?* Whatever the area, if He prompts the vow, follow Him in it and watch Him work.

Pray as the Lord leads...

*How about sharing the Gospel with at least one new unbeliever each month? Pretty awesome task? Pretty awesome God!

Lesson 19 Vows That Make The Marriage Work

KEY VERSE: “Make VOWS to the LORD your God and fulfill them...”
Psalm 76: 11

1. Think of a marriage relationship in your world, one that you have had contact with personally, one that has endured successfully for a long time - say, 35 or more years. Usually there are some things that stand out in such a marriage - memorable things - that tell something about the kind of commitment that was made at its beginning. In your minds eye, consider this marriage as you respond to the following questions: a. What are some of the pressures this marriage has had to endure?

b. Sometimes a couple will make a promise to marriage as an institution (“I’ll stay married no matter what!”), but are not very successful in making the personal relationship part of the marriage work. In effect, they have made a vow to the marriage but not necessarily to their partner. Is this long term marriage (above) a “marriage centered relationship” or a “partner centered relationship”? Describe the qualities that helped you decide which it was:

c. What do you think: has this long term marriage always had lots of love in it to keep it going, or were there times when love was scarce but they kept going anyway?

2. Read Genesis 2: 24 and Ephesians 5: 31. In these passages (translations of the Hebrew and then the Greek for the same thought) is a very brief description of the three principle activities of marriage. What are these three parts, and what does one do to accomplish them in our day ?

PRINCIPLE MARRIAGE ACTIVITY

How Accomplished In Marriage Today

1.

2.

3.

- Is one of these activities a “vow”? If so, which one?

3. Read Ephesians 5: 22- 24 and 5: 25- 28. In this important passage are instructions to husbands and wives on marriage: a. List what you think are the two most difficult activities found in this passage for the WIFE...

b. List what you think are the two most difficult activities found in this passage for the HUSBAND...

c. How often does the average husband or wife succeed in doing the things requested in this passage?

q All the time q Most of the time q Some of the time q Seldom

d. In light of your answer to “c.”, what is it that allows a marriage to succeed?

4. It is evident that the demands of marriage exceed the natural supply of strength and energy to sustain it - at least in the manner intended by God. In the following passages are promises that the followers of God recognized as having come from Him. They were design to help us deal with our weaknesses. In your group see if you can identify these promises:

Psalm 9: 7- 10

Romans 8: 38- 39

John 10: 28, 29

John 15: 5

5. In a recent study a startling discovery was made: 80% of the marriages in which there is an accidental death of a child end in divorce. Describe one or two principles or thoughts from the passages we have studied today that would offer real help for the marriage of such a couple?

6. A Time To Share and A Time To Pray...

Marriage is an awesome thing: it is the blending of two lives in such way so that the two together are equivalent to something greater than either of the two of them alone. The reality of this is played out everywhere in

Scripture. For example: “He who finds a wife finds what is good and receives favor [Lit., a blessing] from the LORD.” Proverbs 18: 22

As we see, not only does obedience bring blessing, but so does a vow - to a wife or husband. For surely, only by a vow does a man and woman actually become husband and wife. If a couple loses sight of the promise to each other before God, or consider their vow as just some vague commitment they made to a principle or an ideal called “marriage,” they will miss part of the blessing that God intended for them to share. Tragically, such a misdirected vow may lead them to grow weary of the person they are married to. But if the vow is properly understood to be a once-for-always, I’ll-keep-it-even-if-you-don’t-or-can’t, and it’s-to-you-as-a-person, the marriage has every opportunity to prosper.

So it is with any vow, honestly made. Do you have a promise that needs clarification and refreshment? Can you share it with your prayer partner? If you are up to date on all your vows, is there one you need to make now to set you into motion for more growth? God bless you as you share and pray...

Lesson 20 Praying Under Pressure- and Not Giving Up

KEY VERSE: “Is any one of you in trouble? He should continuously pray...” James 5:

1. In most everyone’s life there was a time when a difficult situation was faced and a call went out to God. We might be very ill, or facing danger from an unknown intruder in our house, or sliding on ice on a lonely stretch of highway, or... We may not have know who God very well or read much in the Bible, but we called out and there was an answer. The following questions ask us to think about such an experience and the prayer that went with it: a. Tell your group BRIEFLY about such a situation in your life, the prayer, and the answer that came:

b. How much thought did you give to your prayer before you uttered it?

c. When you finally got the prayer out, was it eloquent? Was it phrased in beautiful words? Did it need to be?

d. What were at least two elements to your prayer that made it “effective”?

2. Prayer, like eating food or having the need to be loved, is an almost universal experience. In your own words, describe what prayer to God is all about for you:

3. Jesus is considered the Master teacher on prayer, and rightly so. But we are told only a little about what Jesus actually did and said in His personal prayer time. The following questions ask us to examine the model of “pressure” praying offered to us by Jesus: a. Read Matthew 14: 23- 25. If the Fourth Watch was between 3: 00am and 6: 00am, how LONG did Jesus pray?

b. Read Hebrews 5: 7. How personally involved was Jesus in His prayer time?

c. Read Matthew 26: 36- 44...

- Do you detect any fear in what Jesus says here?

- When others grow weary of praying, what does Jesus do?

- Does Jesus always get a “Yes!” to His heartfelt prayer?

d. After examining the passages in this section, how would you characterize the complexity and formality of Jesus’ prayer life under pressure?

4. The Bible pictures prayer as an activity that can go on all the time, an activity that should be a regular part of the Christian's daily life. But as is the experience of many, prayer gets slowed or comes to a stop, even under pressure. In order to pray the Jesus way - to pray continuously, we have been given some very practical helps. Try to write down the helps from each passage listed below. [NOTE: Some of these are things that we are NOT do, things that keep us from praying continuously]:

Matthew 6: 5- 7

Matthew 7: 7,8

I Timothy 2: 1

I Timothy 2: 8

Colossians 4: 2

Philippians 4: 6

Ephesians 6: 18

5. A Time To Share and A Time To Pray...

Prayer is one of the most important parts of the life we have in Jesus Christ. Yet, few would say that they pray as often or in the way that they ought. Why? The passages we have looked at point this out: we forget that prayer is to be persistent even in the face of difficulty, or a delayed

answer, or the answer “no”. We also forget the huge territory that prayer covers: our worship of God, those that do not know Christ,

authorities, our service people, all those in mission work, our church and its ministers. If we just prayed about the things that God has specifically asked about and those that Jesus and the apostles modeled, there would be no end to prayer!

Maybe it's time for a fresh start on prayer in your life and in your world. Have you thought about a daily prayer basic, like having three square meals or getting into your Bible each day?

With your prayer partner, ask the Lord where he would have you to take the next step in become a man or woman of prayer...

Lesson 21 Finding The Motivation To Stay Prayerful

KEY VERSE: “Is any one of you in trouble? He should continuously pray...” James 5: 13a

1. **BEGINNING A NEW HABIT.** Most of us have had the opportunity of beginning a new habit. It is not always an enjoyable experience at the start - especially if it is “good for us”. The following questions ask us about the process that we must go through to begin and sustain a new habit: a. When you have started a new habit, which comes first (for you) the realization that the old habit was not working, or the attractiveness of the new habit?

b. For you personally, what is the greatest obstacle you face when starting a new habit?

c. Rank the following in personal degree of difficulty: starting a new **MENTAL** habit (e. g., remembering a new telephone # or work routine), beginning a new **EMOTIONAL** habit (e. g., learning to control anger), a new **PHYSICAL** habit (e. g., no finger nail biting), a new **SPIRITUAL** habit (e. g., reading the Bible daily, praying specifically and daily). [“ 1” is the most difficult, etc.]

• mental • emotional • physical • spiritual

d. How long does it usually take for you to have to consciously “work at” a new habit before it becomes “second nature” to you?

e. In changing a habit that is particularly difficult to overcome - especially in the spiritual realm, do you usually call upon other people

for help? If so, who, and, what kind of help from them actually works for you?

2. Read the following passage, noting the various parts of it that discuss prayer:

I Samuel 12: 12 “But when you saw that Nahash king of the Ammonites was moving against you, you said to me, ‘No, we want a king to rule over us’ -- even though the LORD your God was your king. 13 Now here is the king you have chosen, the one you asked for; see, the LORD has set a king over you. 14 If you fear the LORD and serve and obey him and do not rebel against his commands, and if both you and the king who reigns over you follow the LORD your God -- good! 15 But if you do not obey the LORD, and if you rebel against his commands, his hand will be against you, as it was against your fathers. 16 “Now then, stand still and see this great thing the LORD is about to do before your eyes! 17 Is it not wheat harvest now? I will call upon the LORD to send thunder and rain. And you will realize what an evil thing you did in the eyes of the LORD when you asked for a king.” 18 Then Samuel called upon the LORD, and that same day the LORD sent thunder and rain. So all the people stood in awe of the LORD and of Samuel. 19 The people all said to Samuel, “Pray to the LORD your God for your servants so that we will not die, for we have added to all our other sins the evil of asking for a king.” 20 “Do not be afraid,” Samuel replied. “You have done all this evil; yet do not turn away from the LORD, but serve the LORD with all your heart. 21 Do not turn away after useless idols. They can do you no good, nor can they rescue you, because they are useless. 22 For the sake of his great name the LORD will not reject his people, because the LORD was pleased to make you his own. 23 As for me, far be it from me that I should sin against the LORD by failing to pray for you. And I will teach you the way that is good and right. 24 But be sure to fear the LORD and serve him faithfully with all

your heart; consider what great things he has done for you. 25 Yet if you persist in doing evil, both you and your king will be swept away.”

Referring to the scripture passage above, discuss the following: a. What was the action taken by the Israelites that brought wrath from the Lord?

b. If the Lord should unleash the wrath He had toward them, what could happen?

c. What was the 1st step taken by the Israelites once they understood their sin? What was the second step?

d. What temptation did Samuel warn about when God is silent? (vs. 20f)

e. In light of verses 23- 25, what new habit would you understand that the Israelites must learn to develop and keep regarding prayer?

3. Read I John 5: 14,15. Picture yourself as Samuel in the passage in the previous question. What principle from I John would be the most valuable to the Israelites?

4. A Time To Share and A Time To Pray...

The greatest tool for change - for the good - is the power of God. But God has chosen to make his power available to us through prayer. When we ask God what to do, search His Word and then wait upon Him, He

teaches us what is best and then asks us to continue to pray accordingly. The problem comes, first, in that we tend to be such poor listeners, then, second, we tend to think that He does not want us to pray. "He already knows," we often say. But He wants us to pray until we actually see the answer. What will keep us at it? What will keep us praying? It is the underlying principle in all of prayer:

"God, I love you with all my heart, with all my soul, and with all, my mind. Therefore, I will pray for the things you want and will keep praying because you want them and you want me to pray. Because I also love my neighbors, I will keep praying for them as well. I know that your love for me and for them will sustain me in my prayer."

Love is the key to continuing in prayer. A loving community has no problem sustaining its prayers for God's will or for others. In your prayer time, consider the role of love in your prayer life...

Lesson 22 Enjoying the Blessings of Praise

KEY VERSE: "... Is anyone happy? Let him sing songs of praise." James 5: 13b

1. RECEIVING PRAISE. You have just completed an art project for a night class you have been taking. It is a still life oil painting that took a semester of hard work. The professor says "It is wonderful!" but you doubt it. "It's only my third painting!" you say with sincere modesty. He insists on entering it in a community art show. It wins much acclaim and a "Best of Show" blue ribbon.: a. How would you respond to the praise offered by those seeing your work at the art show? What would you say in reply to their comments?

b. What kind of feelings do you usually have as a result of accurate praise?

c. Do you like praise? Do you enjoy receiving it?

d. How does your response differ when praise slips into flattery (i. e., superficial or false praise designed to gain some end to the advantage of the one doing the flattering)? Describe your reaction to false praise:

e. What do you think: Is it appropriate to do something for the purpose of receiving praise?

2. Read Isaiah 29: 13- 16. How does God feel about praise directed toward Him? What do you think his usual response might be?

- How does He feel about false or superficial praise? What does He do about it?

3. Read the following (Psalm 144, of David) and take note of the various reasons the author praises God. Pretend for a moment that you are an American soldier and our nation has come under attack by hostile forces. A pitched battle is taking place in your home town, and you are assigned to protect it. In your group, using your sanctified imaginations, try to think of ways to say what is in the highlighted section only using figures of speech or objects from the 20th century:

Ps. 144: 1 Praise be to the LORD my Rock, who trains my hands for war, my fingers for battle. 2 He is my loving God and my fortress, my stronghold and my deliverer, my shield, in whom I take refuge, who subdues peoples under me. 3 O LORD, what is man that you care for him, the son of man that you think of him? 4 Man is like a breath; his days are like a fleeting shadow.

5 Part your heavens, O LORD, and come down; touch the mountains, so that they smoke. 6 Send forth lightning and scatter [the enemies]; shoot your arrows and rout them. 7 Reach down your hand from on high; deliver me and rescue me from the mighty waters, from the hands of foreigners 8 whose mouths are full of lies, whose right hands are deceitful. 9 I will sing a new song to you, O God; on the ten- stringed lyre I will make music to you, 10 to the One who gives victory to kings, who delivers his servant David from the deadly sword. 11 Deliver me and rescue me from the hands of foreigners whose mouths are full of lies, whose right hands are deceitful. 12 Then our sons in their youth will be

like well-nurtured plants, and our daughters will be like pillars carved to adorn a palace. 13 Our barns will be filled with every kind of provision. Our sheep will increase by thousands, by tens of thousands in our fields; 14 our oxen will draw heavy loads. There will be no breaching of walls, no going into captivity, no cry of distress in our streets. 15 Blessed are the people of whom this is true; blessed are the people whose God is the LORD.

4 In your group, try to identify 4 things which you believe ought to be the object of praise toward God, things for which He gets little verbal praise in our day:

5 A Time To Share and A Time To Pray...

Accurate (that is, specific, genuine, realistic) praise is a blessing to anyone who receives it. Why? Because it is a confirmation of God working in us, that God's design is good and that we are fulfilling our purpose.

In turn, when we praise God, we are honoring the source of all good things, and giving Him the credit he deserves. In this way we bring His love and care and creativity full circle: that which has been made by the Master now gives the Master praise; the pot tells the potter that He is doing good.

Who is the audience for this praise? The whole of creation, including the angels. And so is Satan: every act of praise is a rejection of Satan's thesis that we can do it on our own, and that our way is better. By turning to praise we place in proper perspective all that we have and all that we do. But we so easily get out of practice. We often forget specific, accurate praise.

With your prayer partner(s) spend some time praising some of the things that make you glad God made you and that you know Him...

Lesson 23 Don't Waste Your Illness

KEY VERSE: “Is any one of you sick? He should call the elders of the church to pray...” James 5: 14a

1. BEING SICK. Every family has its traditions concerning illness. As if acting according to some unwritten script, the members of the typical family play out roles (either the role of the sick person or the role of the well person) that get passed down from generation to generation in amazingly consistent ways. Discuss the characteristics of these more common roles as you have encountered them in your experience: a. Describe the “Someone- please- help- me- I’m- dying!” sick person role:

b. Describe the “I’ll- just- grin- and- bear- it- and- no- one- will- know” sick person role:

c. Describe “I’ll- crawl- under- a- rock- &- disappear- until- it- is- over” sick person role:

d. Describe the “We’ll- give- them- anything- they- want- to- make- them- feel- better” well person role:

e. Describe the “There- there- there- there- now” well person role:

f. In your group share the sick person role and/ or the well person role that you think describes you most accurately:

2. Many people find it difficult to except the illness they have and sometimes become very resentful about it. Why do you think they feel this way?

3. There are many discussions about illness in the Bible. The following questions help us examine what the Bible says about the cause of sickness:

a. Read Leviticus 26: 15 and I Corinthians 11: 28- 31. In the Old Testament, God told Israel that sickness sometimes came because of...

b. Read Job 2: 27. But, if a man is righteous and becomes sick, what might be the initial source of the illness?...

c. Read Daniel 8: 27. When we lose our strength and become drained of all energy and end up feeling sick, does it mean that we have sinned?

d. Read II Corinthians 12: 7- 9. Does the Lord use sickness for positive reasons (as opposed to negative punishment)? If so, what?

4. Read Mark 3: 8- 13 & Matthew 13: 55- 58. In these passages, do we have any indication that Jesus healed all of the sick people that he came in contact with? What reasons for this are indicated?:

5. Some people think that Jesus and the Bible promises “To heal all of our diseases” and they cite I Peter 2: 24. Looking at the verse, does it teach that He will heal all of a person’s physical and mental diseases or is he talking about spiritual diseases?

6. Read Matthew 11: 20,21 and 16: 4. If the focus on healing is that God would perform a miracle and restore the body or mind to its original state, will this necessarily help the one seeking it? Could such a seeking actually bring harm?

7. A Time To Share and A Time To Pray...

When we become weak in our physical or mental self, the temptation is to want to be well and seek diligently for wellness while at the same time missing entirely what God is doing in us through the illness. In our life, our spouses life, our children, our friends, our leaders, are lessons that may very well make sickness one of the best things that ever happened to them.

If God uses the sickness and suffering to shape his children for their good, we would do well to ask ourselves as a first thing: “Lord, what is the reason for the visit by this illness?” The answer sometimes takes a while, and sometimes God has to wade through a host of our complaints in getting the answer to us, but it usually comes. To the person that does not trust in the value of illness, there is little gained but disappointment and bitterness.

Have you discovered a lesson or a blessing in illness? Have you ever thanked God for a sickness - that is, that which came through sickness? Among your requests and sharings as you pray, see if you can come to the place where you can express gratitude for what God is doing with your illnesses...

Lesson 24 Discovering Anew The Prayer Of Faith

KEY VERSE: “And the prayer offered in faith will make the sick person well...” James 5: 16a

1. **GOOD STUDENTS.** The School years brought many more lessons than those found on the pages of the “read’n, write’n and ‘rithmetic” books. In fact, some of our most important lessons came from watching our teachers do the business of teaching. In the following questions we will look at some of those lessons: a. What activity or subject was the most interesting for you in the middle school or high school years?

b. What do you think got you interested in this activity or subject? Did the interest or enthusiasm of the teacher contribute to your interest?

c. Teachers judged “excellent” or “best” usually get this reputation by having an abiding interest in their subject, an interest that is contagious. Often it is seen in the teacher that has been at his or her subject for many years. What do you think: How can a teacher continue to want to hear the same old stuff on the same subject repeated back by students year after year?

d. Does God want to hear back from us the things we are learning from Him? Why?

2. Finding the relationship between prayer and faith is a very practical issue for all of us. To search this question out, read Hebrews 11: 8- 18 and

discuss the following in your group: a. “By faith” Abraham did what in the following verses:

1. Vs. 8

2. Vs. 9

3. Vs. 17

b. From what you have read in the passage, how did Abraham know that the actions (recorded in the previous question) were things he was supposed to do? How did he find these things out - or did he just make them up out of his head?

c. According to verse 13, many people coming from Abraham did not get to see all that Abraham was promised yet they continued to live as if it was coming. Why?

d. Can people today live by faith in the same way as described in this passage?

4. Read Hebrews 11: 6 and Acts 27: 25. Putting these two passages together, we learn about both the value of and the process for applying genuine faith.

a. (In 11: 6...) What is the value of genuine faith?

b. (In 27: 25...) What practice puts genuine faith to work?

5. Read James 2: 17. Let us suppose that a person should read something in the Bible - say, "You shall not steal." - a truth that is for all time, and says that he has faith in God but continues to take things that do not belong to him. Does this man have genuine faith? If not, what does he have?

6. A Time To Share and A Time To Pray...

Let there be no mistake, faith is the key. But faith means listening to God, trusting (i. e., believing) Him, and, through appropriating His power, acting on what we understand He wants. Abraham believed God, and we have seen the pleasant result. So did Paul. So did David and Daniel and many, many more.

In John 8: 39 we read "If you were Abraham's children then you would do the things Abraham did." We are the children of Abraham and David and Daniel and, yes, the Lord Jesus, when we do as they did. Whether in the written word or by prompting of the Holy Spirit: the key is to do as the Master wishes.

Has the Master pointed out something He wants from you and wants to enable you to do, but you have only been "thinking about it"? Wouldn't today be the best day to start by saying "Yes, Lord." Then add these all important words: "Lord, please help me." With your prayer partner share and pray as the Lord leads...

Lesson 25 Don't Leave A Friend In His Mess - If You Can Help It

KEY VERSE: "Whoever turns a sinner from the error of his way will save him from death and cover over a multitude of sins." James 5: 20b

1. SAVING A SHIPWRECK VICTIM. From time to time we read or hear about the heroic exploits of Air & Sea Rescue personnel who have saved individuals adrift in the ocean. Finding and recovering those in such peril often proves expensive and time consuming, not to mention dangers involved. A successful rescue involves some very important practices and considerations. Our first question is about these: a. Why is it that people end up adrift in emergency at sea? (Give some of the possible origins for such a possible.)

b. Does it help to have a lot of training to do this kind of rescue work? Have successful rescues been accomplished by individuals with no training? How is this possible?

c. How would you feel as a rescuer if you were called to help someone in trouble in the water and found that they were there because they had done something really stupid. Would you give them a lecture? If so, would it be BEFORE or AFTER the rescue? Why?

d. If a person gets into trouble in the water once, how often do you think a rescuer would be willing to go help them if they got into trouble again?

2. Rescuing people that have gotten into trouble SPIRITUALLY is very important but difficult work and not unlike the work of air and sea rescue.

In the following passage, locate the responses to the questions that follow:

Galatians 6: 1 Brothers, if someone is caught in a sin, you who are spiritual should restore him gently. But watch yourself, or you also may be tempted. 2 Carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ. 3 If anyone thinks he is something when he is nothing, he deceives himself. 4 Each one should test his own actions. Then he can take pride in himself, without comparing himself to somebody else, 5 for each one should carry his own load.

- a. What is the very first thing identified as the initial step in the spiritual rescue program outlined here?

- b. According to this passage, there is just one qualification for the work of rescue: being "spiritual". According to your understanding, what is it like to be "spiritual"? (I Corinthians 3: 1 helps define this term.)

- c. What style or attitude does it say we are to have when we do rescue work? (vs. 1a)

- d. When we begin rescue work, we are told that it may lead to our needing to be rescued - if we are not careful. What sort of care do we need to take?

e. According to verse 1, we are told to “restore” the one that is in need of rescue. The [Greek] dictionary says that this word means “to mend, furnish, or, refinish completely; to make in like new condition”. Does this mean confrontation? Argument? Modeling? What?

f. The word “restore” is also in the present tense meaning, literally, “be continuously making an effort to bring to a like new condition”. What does this say about the length of time it will take and the kind of patience required to finish rescuing?

4. If you were a Christian that had gotten mixed up with sin or wandered away from the truth into a lie or stumble into something trivial, how would you like to be treated, that is, rescued?

6. A Time To Share and A Time To Pray...

Rescue is a very important work that we have all been called to give attention to. There are many who actually need the rescue but too often we are unwilling to take the initiative to begin the process. We have our reasons, but these seem weak when we find ourselves needing to be rescued.

Is there someone in your world that needs a rescue - or at least a rescue attempt? Are you ready to help? If not, can you take the first step to removing whatever it is that is in the way? Pray concerning this as the Lord enables.

Lesson 1 God's Basic Plan For Obtaining A Blessing

KEY VERSE: "... While they sleep The Lord provides for those He loves"
Psalm 127: 2b

1. Take a few minutes and share some of the things you are thankful for, especially some of the things that you can identify as not having come to you as a result of something you did:

2. Some time ago it was written..

"I am a confirmed believer in blessings in disguise. I prefer them undisguised when I myself happen to be the person blessed; in fact, I can scarcely recognize a blessing in disguise except when it is bestowed upon someone else." Robert Lynd

Can you think of a blessing in someone else you could see but the receiver could not see?

- We sometimes miss seeing blessings that God is in the process of giving us. Why do you think it is hard to see personal blessings?

3. Read Job 36: 11 (Job is oldest OT book written); James 1: 25 (James is the first NT book written); I John 3: 22 (I John was one of the last books of the Bible written). What is a basic requirement if a person wishes to experience the blessing of God on a sustained basis?

- What happens when we "blow it" and fail to keep the commandments of God? Does that mean we cannot have His blessing?

4. Read I Corinthians 4: 7. In this passage Paul asks the Corinthians a question that is supposed to help them learn a lesson and get rid of their arrogance. In your own words, rephrase the question and see if you can suggest an answer...

5. God makes certain undeserved provisions for people He loves. These provisions often go unseen, particularly if they involve the prevention of problems. In the following passages, see if you can identify the particular blessing that the author has in mind when he says: “You are blessed...”:

Luke 1: 42

Revelations 14: 13

Matthew 5: 5

Psalm 32: 1,2

Proverbs 14: 21

6. At this point, having looked at some passages that speak about blessings, see if your group can put together a definition of a “blessing”:

7. This week’s focus on care and prayer...

The Bible mentions the word “blessing” hundreds of times – literally, and yet is surprising how infrequently we use the word personally, seek a blessing directly, or give a blessing thoughtfully to another human being.

God's provision for good, and for our personal needs and sense of fulfillment come as a result of the unique unseen strategy regularly employed by Him called "the blessing."

If you have the freedom to do so, take a few moments to confer, by means of prayer, a blessing – sincerely and appropriately – upon two people: someone in your group and someone outside your group.

Lesson 2 Children – A Blessing from God

KEY VERSE: “Sons are a heritage from the LORD, children a reward from him.” Psalm 127: 3

1. Years ago, there was a TV program hosted by Art Linkletter in which children were given an opportunity to answer questions posed by the host. Their candid responses were the source of much laughter because “Kids [Do] Say The Darndest Things.” Frequently the children would reveal events that took place at home, events that might otherwise be secrets. Sometimes they said things that demonstrated when they became a teachers instead of a student at home.

- If you feel free to do so, share an event from your childhood, one in which you were able to teach your parent(s) an important lesson about life:

-

- Can you think of an important lesson about life that you learned from a child? – it can be humorous or serious... give it a try...

2. Read Psalms 127: 3 and Matthew 19: 14. According to these passages what does God think of children? What is his basic attitude toward them?

- Has His attitude changed over the centuries? Is it still the same as it was?

- Is this the attitude we find in our immediate world today? Are children viewed in the way God intended? What do you think?

3. In the following passages see if you can identify some of the reasons why God made children:

- Psalm 127: 4
- Psalm 127: 5
- Matthew 18: 5,6
- Genesis 28: 3
- Proverbs 23: 24,25
- Proverbs 19: 26, 23: 22 and Matthew 15: 3- 6.

What do you think? Did God intend for Children to care for their parents when they are old, or when they were in need?

4. Take a few minutes and try to imagine what the world would be like today if there were no children under 12. What would our world be like?

- If we stopped having children today, what would our world be like in say 30 years?

5. Read Genesis 1: 26- 28. What do you think: Does God want people to have, if their situation makes it at all possible, a number of children?:

7. This week's focus on care and prayer...

The Bible says that children are a gift from God, precious to those who have them and fitly given so that God may – through them – fulfil His purposes in the parents and to succeeding generations.

Rather important are they not? Yet we too often we see them treated both verbally and physically as if they were mere animals. What can we do? At least four things: care for our own children in such a way so as to set an example for the world to follow; speak out when we hear people us words of contempt toward children; take action whenever an opportunity arises for us to support the sacred value of children; and pray for those children we know and see that they may grow up to be a godly seed.

Take time now to pray for the children in your world...

Lesson 3 Let The Spirit Of Oneness Flow!

KEY VERSE: “How good and pleasant it is when brothers live together in unity!” Psalm 133: 1

1. Most of us have experienced a conflict in a ministry setting, whether it be two individuals quarreling over the decorations in a classroom, to a church split over some “major” doctrine. We can all identify with the basic feelings that come with such a painful event. But many of these quarrels are ended in a wonderful way when someone decides to pursue love. Describe some of the things that go on in your heart and mind when a conflict is resolved:

- In situations like the ones mentioned above, does resolution of the conflict just happen? If not, what does it take to bring about resolution and where does its motivation and/ or power come from?
2. Compromise is a familiar term to all of us. Is compromise – especially on matters of doctrine – a wise policy to follow in order to achieve and maintain unity?
- What happens to the group, organization or church which does compromise on important issues? Can it maintain its unity in the long run?
3. In the following passage are mentioned some of the things that make Christian unity work. While they do not cause Christian unity, they are linked to it:

Philippians 2: 2 ... then make my joy complete by being like- minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and purpose. 3 Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. 4 Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others. 5 Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: 6 Who... humbled himself and became obedient to death—even death on a cross!

Identify as many unity factors as you can find... 1.

2.

3.

4

5.

6.

7.

8.

4. Read John 17: 20- 23. 20 “My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, 21 that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so

that the world may believe that you have sent me. 22 I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one: 23 I in them and you in me. May they be brought to complete unity to let the world know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me. • According to this passage, where does unity actually come from?

- How many times does Jesus pray that the believers will be unified in just this one passage?

- What is supposed to be the result of the unity of believers that Jesus asks for?

- What do you think is the relationship between love and unity as indicated in verse 23?

5. What do you think: is unity a promise from God that we claim (something like we claim eternal life based on Jesus' sacrifice) or is it a principle which we apply such as sowing what we wish to reap?

6. This week's focus on care and prayer...

When was the last time you prayed for unity in your family, work, or church. It does not come by accident: it is the result of the prayers of the faithful saints who persist in doing good and use good – a prayer for unity – to overcome evil such as disharmony.

Take a few moments to pray for unity...

Lesson 4 Don't Get Lost Because Of The Signs

KEY VERSE: “Come down to make your name known to your enemies and cause the nations to quake before you!” Isa. 64: 2

1. Modern American advertising is a study in the purpose and use of signs. Plastered all over the buildings and along the roadways of the valley are huge signs informing us about products, events, or, real estate for sale. Some make their point, others fail miserably. Describe a sign that you believe failed to persuade you to take interest in what was advertised. What was it about the sign that made it such a disappointment?:

- By contrast, describe a sign which made a lasting and effective impact. Why did it work for you?

2. If you were about to set out to make a sign for your business – to place in front of your shop or store – what are some of the things you would want to take into consideration with reference to its construction and appearance?:

- How would you know that the sign accomplished its purpose? What evidence would you be looking for that the sign was “working”?

3. The following passages describe and discuss some of the many signs mentioned in the Bible. Identify the sign, describe its purpose (as best as you can with the information given) and give some indication as to its effectiveness:

Judges 6: 36- 40

I Kings 13: 1- 6

II Kings 20: 7- 11

Isaiah 7: 14; Luke 2: 12

4. Read John 2: 12- 25. In this important event in the life of Jesus, we have evidence of some of the ways that signs are misused.

- How did the religious leaders expect signs to be used?

- How did the people expect them to be used?

- What evidence do we have from this passage that Jesus was not very ready to use signs in a general way? (Or, putting it another way: What problem does mankind have that encourages them to look at the sign instead of what the sign is pointing to?)

5. Read Matthew 12: 38- 41. What does Jesus say is the problem with people who seek for a sign? What does he say will be offered to those do such seeking?

- Jesus says that key events in the life of Jonah will be a sign for those who seek a sign. It was not just the three days in the great fish that was this “sign of Jonah”. What do you think: did the the Ninevites respond to the message of Jonah because he spent three days in the fish or because he had seen God and they could see God in his face and message? Or, was their repentance for some other reason?

[Optional] 6. Read I Corinthians 1: 20- 23. What is it that the Jews and Gentiles were looking for – in general concerning spiritual things – during the time of the Apostles? How did this get in the way of their understanding Jesus' gospel message?

7. This week's focus on care and prayer...

Signs are symbols that point to real things – things that actually exist. A sign is ineffective when it either fails to reveal the thing it is pointing toward or – by being so interesting – it gets more attention than the thing it is pointing out.

When God uses signs, He only puts up a few, and He very carefully situates them in time and place to point to certain things: the authority of the Bible, the truth of the resurrection, the good news of salvation, the power and Justice and Love of God., the coming of Christ, and little else.

Signs point to God and it is with Him that our focus should rest. The signs that the Lord creates point to aspects of Him and His plan that He desires for us to see, remember and appreciate. When a sign becomes an end in itself, it begins to take God's place; it becomes an idol. When men seek for a sign, they are – in all reality – engaging in form of idol worship.

With your prayer partner, take a few moments and share some of the signs God has used in the Bible or your life, tell what you think they reveal about God, and then, praise Him for the greatness revealed through them.

Lesson 5 Generosity, God's Planning For Meeting Needs

KEY VERSE: “Each man should give what he has decided in his heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. “
II Cor. 9: 7

Note: This lesson is about generosity in general. While giving to the work of the Kingdom of our Lord is in view as well, we shall be examining principles that apply to all types of giving.

1. We have all received gifts of one kind or another. Tell about a gift that you received that was dear to you, one that represented a special sacrifice or understanding on the part of the giver:

- Tell us about how your relationship with the giver of the gift was affected by this special gift. Did it improve? Why or why not?

2. If you have the freedom to do so, tell us about what kind of gift giver you are. Are you a “last- minuter”? Are you “extravagant”? Are you “sensible”? Are you “personal”? Use words that would tell us about the manner of your giving:

- [Now this will take some thought and you may feel a little uncomfortable in answering it but give it a try if you feel free to do so:] Can you think of a gift you have given to someone that might explain what kind (or type) of giver you are?

3. In the Bible there are many examples of God giving gifts to people. Even if the Bible is not very familiar ground, there are a few that will stand out. What – in your estimation – are some of God’s best gifts? What do these gifts that you have selected tell us about God’s way of giving?:

4. In the following passages are some of the principles that the Lord wants us to keep in mind when we give to others. See if you can identify the general principle involved in each of the following:

Romans 12: 8

Matthew 6: 1- 3

Matthew 5: 42

Matthew 10: 8

II Corinthians 9: 7

II Chronicles 31: 5

4. Read II Corinthians 8: 12 & 8: 3a. Sometimes it seems that God says believers are to give “according to their ability” and at other times He says it is better to give “beyond our ability”. • Is it possible for us to give “beyond our ability”? If so, how?

• When giving a gift, what considerations might apply to help us to determine which of the above rules [giving by ability or beyond ability] might apply?

5. This week’s focus on care and prayer...

God has so designed the universe, that generosity is a major component of the life we live with Him. Consider some of these aspects of generosity:

• Generosity is is freely giving to others as if they were Jesus and not just people. • Generosity is more than philanthropy because generosity involves sharing from the abundant storehouse of God and not limiting our giving to our personal storehouse. • Generosity involves faith: It is trusting God to use us to meet a need in the life of another.

Are you generous? Do you give by faith?

With your prayer partner, thank God for His wonderful gifts and ask Him how He might work through you this week to touch the life of another by expressing generosity.

Lesson 6 What The Bible Says About Truth

KEY VERSE: “For the word of the LORD is right and true; He is faithful in all he does.” Psalm 33: 4

Note: This lesson focuses on truth. To remain consistent, when we use the word “truth” we mean that which is “actual, real, and authentic.” When we use “Truth” we mean the Bible as in both the Old and New Testaments.

1. Telling the truth has been a challenge for all peoples over the centuries. Describe some of the situations where telling the truth is vital. (Select examples from several realms that you’re familiar with):

- Describe some of the consequences that occur in the above situations when the truth is not forthcoming.

- What happens to you – in your heart – when you discover you have been told a lie?

2. What happens to relationships when they are built on a pattern of deceit?:

- What would probably happen to a person’s relationship with God if they discovered that God’s Truth turned out not to be true after all?

3. Read John 17: 15- 18, 8: 43- 46 and 1: 14. Based on these passages, what does Jesus say is the nature of His words – any of them – as far as the truth is concerned? Does Jesus claim to be absolutely honest?

4. Read and consider each of the following passages, then summarize the principle given and ask...

- “Does God want us to be honest?” and
- “Does He want us to be honest all the time, every time?”

Proverbs 12: 19

Zephaniah 3: 13

Ephesians 4: 24,25

5. Read Colossians 3: 9,10. Identify the reason and the basis for our being truthful at all times as given in this passage:

6. What is the fate of the one who chooses falsehood over truth?

Proverbs 12: 22

Proverbs 19: 5

Revelation 21: 8

7. This week's focus on care and prayer...

If God is true and truthful, we can rightfully anticipate His Son, His Word, and even His children to also be true. While it is also true that being honest/ truthful does not mean that we tell everything on our mind or disclose all information we possess (to do so would be to give the details of evil or violate an appropriate confidence or relate very personal items), it is also true that God wants us to leave no false impression.

God never leads us – His children – astray. He never toys with us, never plays unrighteous games with our minds or hearts, never lies by telling us just what we want to hear. God is true. God is faithful.

Have you been honest with God? With yourself? With others? Those are big questions, more than we can consider in our moments together, but we can take a moment with at least one of them. Perhaps the first is the most important. With your prayer partner explore at least one of these questions, and to the extent you feel free to do so, share with your prayer partner(s) how you are doing in this area. Take another step with honest as God leads...

Lesson 7 The Believer's Staying Power

KEY VERSE: “Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up.” Galatians 6: 9

1. Take a few minutes to share with the group how it feels to go through a period of “dryness” with respect to your job, career, or some other endeavor to which you have committed yourself:

- What is it like to go through a period of “dryness” in your relationship with God or in the reading of the Bible (most Christians have had at least one such period)?

- Suggest some possible reasons why God might permit these periods of dryness to occur:

2. What is the opposite of spiritual dryness? If a person is spiritually saturated, what might such an experience be like?

3. The Bible indicates that spiritual dryness can occur for several very different reasons. From the passages listed below, see if you can identify some basic reasons for its occurrence:

Psalm 32: 3,4

Psalm 31: 9- 13

Isaiah 28: 12

Psalm 68: 6c

Amos 8: 11- 13

4. The scriptures are full of the antidote for the naturally occurring periods of spiritual dryness we have in our lives. From the passages below, see if you can identify the basic ingredients of the antidote:

Isaiah 55: 1,2

Matthew 5: 6

I Peter 2: 2,3

Acts 3: 19

Proverbs 2: 3- 5

Isaiah 58: 9b- 11

Hosea 10: 12

5. See if you can recall some of the things that the saints of old did to get “cheered up” spiritually? Which ones have been the most helpful to you?

6. A Time To Share and A Time To Pray...

Most of us have an area of our life which is not in a growth mode at present. Sometimes it is because we need a much deserved rest. (Praise the Lord! REST is in God’s vocabulary!) But “rest” is not the only reason for inactivity: there are usually areas that are experiencing a “dry” period. In fact, our whole life may be experiencing that strange dry time. Can you talk about it? Can you share how it is going in that area? Can you identify the reason as indicated above in question #2? Read the quotation below and share as you have the freedom to do so.

A Testimony Concerning One Man's Blessing Following A Period Of Dryness:

Adam Clarke was one of the greatest Bible teachers of the 19th century, but he too went through a dry period which, in his case, lasted for 2 years. During this long stretch of seeming unfruitfulness, he continued to devote a portion of each day to faithfully studying from the Bible, usually for several hours, though he seemed to get almost nothing from it. One day, the Lord rewarded his faithfulness by opening up his mind to all manner of spiritual understanding to the great themes, hidden truths, practical wisdom and important spiritual threads of thought in the Bible. The discipline of the long spell of dryness was rewarded with a great shower of blessing.

Lesson 8 What The Bible Says About The Value Of The Bible

KEY VERSE: “If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples.”
John 8: 31

1. Think back to the first time you can actually remember reading the Bible for yourself. [Select a memory from your high school or adult years.] What were your initial impressions of the Bible? Was The Book mysterious? Encouraging? Difficult? Frustrating? Wonderful? Overwhelming? Or...?

- When you had problems understanding the Bible during the early years of your exposure to it, what were some of the questions or type of questions you remember asking?

- To whom did you direct these questions? Do you feel you received adequate answers?

2. Read II Peter 1: 20,21; Hebrews 1: 1; I Corinthians 2: 13 (in the NIV). According to these passages, where did our Bible come from? Specifically, who was responsible for it being written? Did anyone help with this project?

3. According to the following passages, how does a person go about understanding the meaning of the Bible as it is being read or studied? Or, looking at the issue in a different light, what kinds of things should a student of the Bible expect to discover?

I Peter 2: 2

II Timothy 3: 16,17

Psalms 19: 11

Matthew 7: 24

Psalm 119: 130

4. How long is the Bible good for, ie, how many generations, peoples or tongues will it be valid for?

Matthew 5: 18

Matthew 24: 35

I Peter 1: 23- 25

5. In order to grasp these important life changing truths as found in the Bible, what practices make it possible to study and retain the truths effectively?

Joshua 1: 8

I Peter 1: 22

John 5: 39

Acts 17: 11

6. In light of our study, how much time do you think it would take (give a minimum, please) in study of the Bible to begin to experience the kind of results promised?

7.. A Time To Share and A Time To Pray...

Both Moses and Jesus have said: “Man does not live by bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of the LORD.”

There is a minimum amount of food that it takes for the body to stay healthy – an amount that varies according to the amount of activity in that body. The same is true spiritually. There is a minimum input for the soul to stay healthy, too, and this minimum increases with any increase in the activities of the soul.

How much time does it take to become a man or woman influenced by the Word of God for the good? What kind of minimum threshold do we need to cross in order to come to the point where we are fed (ie, nurished or satisfied) in our soul rather than starved?

Discuss this with your prayer partner, and, to the degree you are free, share how well you're during in reaching a personal minimum in spiritual feeding. Pray as the Lord leads you.

Lesson 9 Last Words – Vital Words

KEY VERSE: “... And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.” Matt. 28: 20

1. FAMOUS LAST WORDS. There used to appear in the newspaper a comic strip by that title. It contained amusing and clever words spoken by the wise and the foolish at their last moments in a position, job, relationship or just before some catastrophe struck them. Can you recall any “famous last words” from history or fiction?

2. Picture this unique scene: You have just discovered that within 24 hours you will be leaving this earth for heaven. Your friends are all aware of your departure and have planned a party of sorts for you. They want to say “See you later!” and spend some parting time with you. They ask you to say something about your life. What might be some of the things you would say?

- If these were all people in your church, what might you say to encourage and help them with their ministry after you are gone?

3. Jesus also had some last words for His followers. They were spoken at several events at the very end of His life on earth (after His resurrection). In these “famous last words” He touched on several topics He knew to be of utmost importance to those that were to deal with the circumstances of life after He left.

In the following passages, see if you can identify these basic topics. (Note: It will be difficult, but please try to limit yourself to a basic one or two word summary of each mentioned topic).

Matthew 28: 18- 20

Mark 16: 15,16

Luke 24: 46- 49

Acts 1: 4- 8

4. Referring to the material gleaned in the previous question, what was Jesus basic message concerning each of the following questions?

- In leaving His disciples, what was He leaving behind to help them? (Caution: this is not the same thing as what they could expect to receive from Him shortly):

- What was the typical follower of Jesus now going to be able to do with relation to the Good News?

- What were the geographic or cultural limits set on the sharing of the Good News?

- What was to motivate the followers of Jesus to share the Good News?

- What things should be avoided that can distract His followers from sharing the Good News?

5. How well do think Jesus' followers are doing – today – in their response to His last words?

6. A Time To Share and A Time To Pray...

Jesus saved some of His most important words to the very end of His earthly life. His followers were keenly aware of their importance in that they spoke of them often and acted on the constantly.

Today the followers' response to Jesus' message seems to very considerably. But, lest we be tempted to judge someone else before we look at ourselves, we need to ask: "How am I responding to His words?"

With your prayer partner(s), consider Jesus' message and how you yourself are responding to it. Share as you have the freedom to do so...

Lesson 10 Who Is Jesus? Part I

KEY VERSE: “Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, Jeremiah or one of the prophets.” Matthew 16: 14

1. During the ‘60’s, a well know Christian campus organization designed a community survey form to be used as a tool to discern the religious attitudes of both students and non- students in college towns. One of the questions proved to be unusual in that it provoked a great deal of interest and produced a wide variety of different answers: “Who – in your opinion – is Jesus Christ?” What were some of the answers that you would guess might be given?:

2. Read Matthew 16: 13- 17.

- In verse 14, several answers are suggested by the disciples as to who Jesus was. What did they say and why do you think they suggested these particular answers?

- In verse 16 the disciples – in this case Peter – gave what they thought was their own personal conclusion as to who Jesus was. What was his (their) answer? If we had the opportunity to ask them (before Jesus said what He said in verse 17) as to how they knew that Jesus was the Christ, what do you think Peter would have said?

- Jesus tells His disciples that they did not come to the conclusion that Jesus was the Christ by means of their own powers of observation or deduction. How did they find out who He was?

3. The Bible indicates that there were certain things about the message and ministry of Jesus that revealed His true nature. Identify these qualities (often more than one) as seen in each of the following passages:

Matthew 7: 28,29

Mark 1: 21- 28

Luke 4: 40,41

Matthew 8: 23- 27

4. Those that knew Jesus or were witnesses of the events of His life or the words of His message, came to very definite conclusions about Him. In the passages below are observations/ testimonies from these observers. In each example, see if you can identify both the witness and the conclusions that witness came to:

Matthew 27: 50- 54

John 20: 24- 28

I Corinthians 15: 3- 8

John 4: 19- 26, 28- 30, 39- 42

5. Based on the information that these witnesses provide, and based on your knowledge of the human heart, what might be the conclusion you would draw if you were there in Israel with Jesus during His ministry there? Who would you have thought He was? [Note: try to put yourself in His shoes of someone that did not know much about the Bible.]:

6. A Time To Share and A Time To Pray...

He was a man whose deeds were so numerous and so extraordinary that to tell all about what He did and the consequent impact of His actions would – in the words of the Apostle John – “I suppose.. even the whole world would not have room for the books that would be written.”

What He did was strange and often wonderful to the observers, but the human heart is blind to the spiritual reality of his true character. It takes God to break through our blindness. Has He been able to break through your natural resistant barriers? Do you see Him as He is?

Sometimes we have seen Him as He is, but we have grown cold and hardened and we lose sight of His real nature and ministry. John recorded this as a loss of our first love. If things are not as fresh as they were at the start, it just might be time for you to take another close look at him and get some spiritual refreshment through prayer; ask Him to restore the “joy of your salvation” in Him.

Lesson 11 Who Is Jesus? Part II

KEY VERSE: “Anyone who has seen Me has seen the Father.” John 14: 9b

1. During the 1980’s, a number of individuals in the scientific community began to suggest (or admit – depending on how one looks at it) that there were some major mysteries in the world that seemed beyond scientific understanding. In fact one science magazine devoted most of one issue to these mysteries (example: “What caused the death of all the dinosaurs?”).

In a similar way, there are mysteries about the nature of God that are hard to understand and seem to have no explanation which most people can understand or agree upon. List some of the questions people might have about God that probably would be very difficult for them to come up with an explanation:

- Of all the questions your group came up with, which one seems to you to be the most challenging?

- What is(are) the reason(s) you think it might be the most challenging: Too little information available? Too much information available? Too confusing? Too complex? Over our heads? Too controversial? Or...?

2. One of the mysteries about God that seems to generate the most speculation – and controversy – is the belief that Jesus is God. In your experience has this been a difficult issue? If so, can you suggest one reason why it might be so?

3. In the following passages are some of the things that Jesus said about His relationship with the Father (God). Identify the position He expresses as indicated by each:

John 5: 17,18

Mark 2: 5- 7 (Compare with Isaiah 43: 25)

John 14: 9

John 8: 58

4. Next, let's examine some of the passages that describe how the Disciples came to understand who Jesus was:

John 1: 1

John 20: 28

Hebrews 1: 8

Luke 24: 52 (compare with Exodus 20: 3- 6)

5. Read John 10: 31- 33. Who did the enemies of Jesus (those that wanted to kill Him) understand as the one Jesus claimed to be?

6. Based on the information supplied thus far, what conclusions do you draw as to the identity of Jesus?:

7. A Time To Share and A Time To Pray...

If Jesus is only a man, what would this mean for the Christian faith? There would be no permanent forgiveness of sins, Jesus would be a liar and not perfect, and the Christian faith would all be in vain. Pretty serious stuff!

But if He is God, then He has all the attributes of God, stands with all of God's power and can do anything that He claims or promises to do – especially for us His children.

In your prayer time, take a few minutes to worship Jesus as the Disciples did and ask Him for His leading as you approach the challenges of your week. See if you can identify at least one promise from Him that fits an area that is of particular concern to you. God bless you as you pray.

Lesson 12 Removing Sin Obstacles

KEY VERSE: “Against You and only You have I sinned...” Psalm 51: 4

1. Being right all the time. Most of us are uncomfortable with a relationship in which we are constantly exposed to a “I- gotta- be- right- all- the- time” attitude on the part of someone else. Someone who insists that their opinions and ideas are superior, their judgement the soundest, their facts the most accurate – even when they are open to question, is a hard person to get along with. Many of the following questions focus on dealing with this type of relational attitude:

- What is it about this attitude that is the most irritating for you?

- What are some of the problems that result from someone imposing this kind of attitude upon a relationship? What can it do to a friendship or a family?

- Do you have difficulty recognizing it when you are doing it?

2. In your estimation, what does God think about this kind of attitude? Is it “wrong”? Does He accept it as “normal”?

- Read Isaiah 65: 2- 7. In this account of Gods response to Israel’s self-righteous religious practices, what does God say are His feelings?

3. Read Romans 7: 18- 20 and Ecclesiastes 7: 20. Is sin – on our part – inevitable? Why?

4. The Bible indicates that when we sin we are to take certain actions (indicated in the passages below). See if you can identify these particular actions and suggest why some might feel these actions might be difficult to do:

Psalms 32: 5

Lamentations 3: 40- 42

I John 1: 8,9

James 5: 16

Psalms 119: 59,60

5. Read James 4: 10 and Matthew 23: 12. What does God do with the person that comes to the place where they can fully confess their sin? [NOTE: See if you can give some particulars for examples.]

6. A Time To Share and A Time To Pray...

The Lord has a wonderful way of dealing with our sin. All He asks is that we confess things to Him in a regular and ongoing way. He promises that he will do something special if we do: to cleanse, to heal, to lift up, to strengthen.

As you have the freedom, share your burdens and see if you can experience the blessings the Lord promises when we do...

Lesson 13 Finding THE WAY In This World

KEY VERSE: “Apollos had been instructed in THE WAY of the Lord and he spoke with great fervor and taught about Him accurately...” Acts 18: 25

1. A right way to do it – and a wrong way. In many professions there are certain activities that afford a certain amount of liberty in how they are done. Take interior decorating for example: there are many colors, fashions and styles to choose from in finishing a room. But there are some other occupations that have a very narrow range of choices as to how something can be done. Consider some of these as your group responds to the following questions:

- There are a number of occupations which require (by the very nature of their field of operation) very limited choices, and often no choices at all. List some of these...

- What are some of the factors make the choices so limited in these various fields?

- In your occupation are there some activities that can be done only one way? If possible, give an example:

2. In our culture and society there are many choices whether it be of autos, canned tuna, magazines on gardening, or restaurants. Choices seem to abound concerning morals and religion as well. Do people really want more choices today? Do they want more moral and religious choices? Why?

3. Read Matthew 22: 16 and Acts 24: 14. The early Christians were called The Followers Of The Way. Why do you think they were given the title “THE Way”?

4. Read Acts 4: 12. What was the basic reason why the early Christians were so narrow in there teaching?

5. The followers of Jesus had a number of secondary reasons why they understood the Master as teaching only ONE WAY to find eternal life. List the reasons suggested in the following passages :

John 6: 67,68

John 8: 24

John 3: 16

John 6: 35

John 3: 3- 5

6. Read Acts 19: 9 and Acts 19: 23- 28. What is the reaction people will have when they are given such narrow choices about something that has such a big impact on their lives (not to mention eternity!)?

7. A Time To Share and A Time To Pray...

This was a difficult lesson because we have been faced with the fact that the truth and allegiance to it can bring pressure. But has this not been the case in all of history? Did not Columbus face it, or Galileo, or Noah face pressure because of the narrow choice selection they offered – which was often no choice at all.

The Lord Jesus says that He is THE way and THE truth and THE life and that no one comes to the father but by Him. That is a very narrow choice. Do we accept His way? His truth? His life offer? Are we ready to live by them? These are very narrow questions with broad sweeping implications.

In your prayer time, consider some choices that may be before you at this time and consider together what His choice may for you. Ask for wisdom and discernment. He stands ready to guide you...

Lesson 14 The KING Is The KING

KEY VERSE: “And I confer on you a kingdom, just as my Father conferred one on me, so that you may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom ...” Luke 22: 29,30

1. There are few individuals in this world who still hold the title of “KING,” but there are a number who have a type of authority that is similar to that once held by them. In your group, discuss some of the individuals you are aware of that exercise authority along the lines of a KING:

- Are there people in your profession or your immediate world who exercise (or attempt to exercise) KINGLY authority? [NOTE: Not all of those that use authority of a KING are ones who use it for evil purposes. In fact, many use it for the good.]

- KINGS were once numerous throughout the world. How did their power and authority differ from that of present world?

- Speculate as to the reason why there are so few KINGS today:

2. Read John 18: 33- 38. Jesus revealed to Pilate that He – Jesus – was a KING...

- What do you think Jesus meant by this? Was He a KING or did He mean that He would become a KING eventually?

- What do you think Pilate understood Jesus to mean when He said He was a KING?

- What was the outcome of His claim? Did it seem to have an effect on the outcome of his trial?

3. Read Revelation 19: 11- 16. According to the New Testament Jesus will return in a way that will give evidence of His KINGSHIP.

- In your own words, explain what Jesus will be like when He returns. Describe, also, what sorts of things He will have on the top of His priority list:

- Based on the way people are dealing with those in absolute authority today, what kind of reception do you think He will receive?

4. Read Luke 22: 24- 30; I Corinthians 6: 2,3; Revelations 3: 21. The Lord Jesus guards His authority with great care, yet He indicates that He will share certain aspects of His KINGSHIP.

- According the passages cited above, what are some of the major areas the Lord plans to share concerning His authority?

- Which ones will you receive personally?

- The responsibilities revealed above appear to be non- optional. Assuming that they are non- optional, describe – if you have the freedom to do so – your feelings about them:

5. A Time To Share and A Time To Pray...

The KING, King Jesus, will come to a place in time and history when He will settle all accounts, right all wrongs done by man, cleanse the world of sin and wickedness. Those that trust in Him will share in that process.

How does that change the here and now? Perhaps we will trust Him more fully, trust in our own initial judgement a little less, be somewhat more patient, and be a lot less worried about how things will turn out – at least those things we have placed in His hand.

Is there something you need to turn over to His Kingship? Is there some trusting of His judgement that you need to do?

With your prayer partner(s), consider these things and pray as the Lord leads...

Lesson 15 Experiencing The Kingdom Of Light

KEY VERSE: “I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.” John 8: 12

1. Light is such a common phenomena – even the electric lights we use virtually every day, that we can take for granted its presence and usefulness. The following questions ask us to re- examine its place in our lives:

- Street lights are at most corners in the cities across our land. What is(are) their purpose(s)? Do they generally succeed in accomplishing this?

- The surgeon’s operating table is generally bathed in light – bright light. What is its function/ purpose?

- In the following settings, one generally finds a restricted amount of light. In each case what might account for the small amounts of light? A photo developing studio; a tavern; a theater; a sleeping porch.

- 35mm cameras are usually equipped with a flash attachment. What is the purpose of this extra light source? Looking at it in another way, why do cameras need it when the eye seemingly does not?:

2. The following questions are based on John 3: 19- 21: “19 This is the verdict: Light has come into the world, but men loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil. 20 Everyone who does evil hates the light, and will not come into the light for fear that his deeds will be

exposed. 21 But whoever lives by the truth comes into the light, so that it may be seen plainly that what he has done has been done through God.”

- Why is it that mankind reacts so indifferently or so negatively to genuine spiritual light?

- According to this passage what is the person who fears spiritual light actually afraid of?

- To what will the honest, truthful person be drawn eventually?

3. In each of the following passages there is a source of light mentioned and frequently a function for that light source. See if your group can identify each as they appear:

Scripture	Light Source	Purpose of the Light
Philippians 2: 15		

James 1: 17

I John 1: 5

John 1: 4,5

Matthew 5: 14,16

4. Read I John 1: 5- 7.

- What is the “light”?

- What is the purpose of the light, ie, what does the light do?

- What happens to the group of people that make a commitment to live according to and “in” the light?

5. A Time To Share and A Time To Pray...

The Bible teaches us that God has called us out of the kingdom of darkness into the kingdom of light. By this He means that we have moved from a place of lies, self deception and the practice of evil to a place of truth, humility and the practice of love and purity.

The problem seems to lay in the prevailing love of darkness, the driving desire to keep things hidden, unconfessed, and unaltered for the good. When we refuse to move in the direction of light, there is a terrible consequence, fellowship with both man and God is hindered.

The bottom line in all this? God draws a vivid picture: we must look at our selves with accuracy and honesty. We must allow the brightest lights to shine down on us, and then we must open our eyes and see what we are really like. The temptation will be to want the lights – the light from heaven – to shine down on others, not us. But God says that is where it must begin if we wish to be lights in this world.

With your partner(s), pray as the Lord lights concerning light in your life...

Lesson 16 Our God Is Bigger Than ‘Enough’

KEY VERSE: “... the LORD your God is God of gods and Lord of lords, the great God, mighty and awesome, who shows no partiality and accepts no bribes.” Deuteronomy 10: 17

1. UFO’s. There is much talk about the possibility of visitors from other planets, and, the news media – both the sensational and the legitimate – have speculated about such visits. Some individuals convincingly describe encounters with “beings from other worlds.” In what ways does such an encounter seem to impact the one who has experienced it? What changes have you noticed or heard about in such people?:

2. Let us suppose for a moment that you actually met someone from another world. They demonstrated great power and shared some amazing secrets about health, personal fulfillment and the meaning of life. Do you think you would share that information readily? Or, would you be afraid? How do you think people would treat you once you told them about your discovery?:

3. The following passages describe some of the things our God has done to reveal Himself to men. Many of the things He has done were unusual. Note the thing which God did and the reaction by the Lord’s people as they experienced it: Exodus 14: 29- 31

Matthew 8: 23- 27

Acts 1: 9- 11

Luke 5: 4- 11

4. Read Joshua 4: 21- 24. Why does God do the many awesome things He does?:

5. How do those that have not noticed or realized God is at work respond to the people who have seen His awesome power at work? [Note that there may be several different responses in each passage]:

Acts 2: 7- 13

Acts 17: 30- 34

Hebrews 11: 31- 40

6. Read I Thessalonians 1: 5; Isaiah 40: 29- 31. Some people are telling the world about visits of aliens from space. Others are telling about God visiting man to save man from himself. What similarities and differences are there between these two “projects”?

6. This week's focus on care and prayer...

Weak and weary? Full of fainting instead of power? The Bible is full of stories of weak people trying to do the impossible and feeling faint. The surprise is that they accomplish their goal not because of their own power but because of His power. He is a great and mighty God!

The Bible says that being good, doing good works, and turning the world right side up are things that only God in us can accomplish. They cannot be done consistently by any human power alone. To lean on this power requires a simple trust in and an accurate picture of the our powerful God.

Can you call to mind His mighty acts? Have you seen His hand at work in the past or the present? Take time with your prayer partner to review His power and seek his power in the situations that are at hand in your life this week. God will bless you and enable you...

Lesson 17 Getting Help When Following God

KEY VERSE: “. If you carefully observe all these commands I am giving you to follow– to love the LORD your God, to walk in all his ways and to hold fast to him– 23 then the LORD will... “ Deuteronomy 11: 22b, 23a

1. Following directions. From the correct solution to that question on the Geometry Test, to opening the the lid on a new medicine bottle, to preparing a batch of cookies like Grandma used to make, following the the directions correctly is vital. The wrong choice, the wrong sequence, or leaving something out can leave us with a disaster on our hands. Tell about a time in your life or in the life of someone you know when failure to follow directions caused a REAL problem:

2. Why is it that some of us “freelance” when it comes to following directions; why do we chose our own route rather than adhere to the directions that come with the product, package, or procedure?:

3. Read Matthew 22: 34- 40 and I John 5: 3- 5. Just how complex are God’s expectations of us if we are to follow Him? Now, estimate the degree of difficulty that goes with following God’s directions:

4. According to the Scriptures, what are some of advantages available to those that would say “Yes!” to following God’s directions in this life?

Mark 3: 35

John 15: 10,14

John 14: 23

I John 3: 22

Luke 11: 27,28

5. Read II John 6- 9. The Bible has some strong things to say about our expressing faith in Jesus but not obeying His teachings. In your own words, describe this principle as Apostle John has given it:

6. Read Psalm 44: 5; John 16: 33; Romans 8: 35- 37. If we follow God's direction, can we expect help from God to do it? Can we expect to win in the end against those forces that would seek to discourage, deceive, or defeat us?:

7. This week's focus on care and prayer...

God loves us and gives us directions that help us respond in a practical way to that love. He tells us how to please Him and He tells us that what pleases Him will be the best possible situation for us. (What a terrific arrangement!) The end result is that we are all pleased and fulfilled.

But in our lack of understanding of what God is doing, in our difficulty in believing that His requests are in our best interest, we build up skepticism and, sometimes, bitterness: we feel we could do a better job writing up commandments, laws, and directions. As a result, we have no faith in the laws or in the person of God. No wonder we suffer from a lack of spiritual power.

With your prayer partner, consider this question: “Have I accepted the Lord’s right to make all final decisions in my life?” Or, putting it another way, “Have I said ‘Yes!’ to the laws, commands, and directions from the Lord for my life?”

Perhaps you can identify one place where you have yet to say yes. It is the place to begin. Can you say yes tonight?...

Lesson 18 Sustaining The Blessing Of God

KEY VERSE: “The faithless man shall be fully repaid for his ways, and the good man shall be rewarded for his.” Proverbs 14: 14

1. Hidden defects can make for difficult, unexpected problems. Mis-repaired machinery, diseased farm animals, defective computer programs (they have viruses too!), genetically faulty seeds, all are hidden problems that can cause terrible consequences. Give some examples of hidden problems in people that usually eventuate in a disastrous outcome:

2. By way of contrast, see if you can identify several hidden qualities in people – perhaps an individual you know personally – that have led to unexpected blessings to others.

3. Humans have the tendency to evaluate situations based on inadequate information. God evaluates things in a very different way. In the Bible we see examples of superficial analysis (earthbound wisdom) and genuine discernment (the wisdom that comes from above). In the following two passages, we have an example of these two points of view. Decide which is which and which is accurate: Psalm 125: 3- 5

Ecclesiastes 9: 2

4. The following passages cite examples of people in a backslidden condition. See if you can identify a characteristic which qualifies the person described as a “backslider”. I Kings 11: 4

II Chronicles 25: 1,2,14

Psalm 78: 57

Hosea 6: 4

Luke 8: 13

5. Although outwardly the difference might not be very great – especially at the start, inwardly there is a considerable difference between the backslider (the faithless man) and the good man (the one who is faithful). Note the character of the “good” man in the following passages: Proverbs 12: 14

Proverbs 13: 15

Proverbs 14: 22

Psalm 34: 10

Proverbs 13: 22

6. Read Zepheniah 1: 4- 6. In the days of the prophets mentioned in the Bible, the peoples turned from God to worship idols made with hands and the gods of the pagan peoples (gods of water, land, the harvest, etc.) To were do the peoples of our day turn when they become faithless?:

7. This week's focus on care and prayer...

To discover whether we are faithful or faithless – in any given area of our life, all we have to do is take an inventory of the kind of thoughts we are having in that area. What is the desire of our heart there?

Backsliding is to be faced with the same reality and courage as any other problem, although it is more in the category of cancer than that of say acne. It is serious, even deadly, but it need not be that way.

Are you adrift in an area of life? Can you talk about it? There is always someone someplace willing to identify with your problem and be a prayer partner in your recovery. Open your heart to the degree that you can. Remember, it is the Lord who wishes to bless you and it is the Lord that waits for you...

Lesson 19 Lessons From The Prayer Life Of Jesus

KEY VERSE: “But Jesus often withdrew to lonely places and prayed”
Luke 5: 16

1. Seeking help from a parent, a teacher, or even a friend can be a difficult thing to do when we are in those “middle years” – not a little kid, but not yet an adult – trying to grow up. We need to have new information with which to face life’s challenges but we are not ready to ask. In your group, share some of the reasons why we might be reluctant to ask:

2. Once we get over the initial fears and doubts about asking, and find the right people to ask, what are some of the emotional and practical benefits of asking for help:

3. Read Mark 1: 35- 39. Jesus left us an example in the area of prayer, but His example raises some very difficult questions. Although an exhaustive answer will not be possible in the time you have together, discuss the following: a. Where did Jesus pray and why did He pick this type of place?

b. What time did he pray and why did he pray at this time?

c. If Jesus was God, why would He pray for long periods of time in an isolated place?

4. Read Luke 5: 13- 17. What types of difficult things happened in the life of Jesus that prompted Him to prepare Himself by prayer? Do similar difficult things happen to people today?

5. Read Luke 6: 12,13,17. What length of time did Jesus spend in prayer in this situation? What circumstance prompted Him to pray in this way? What do you think: did He ever pray on other occasions in this way?

6. Christians do not have the same position, duties, and responsibilities as Jesus. Does this mean Christians do not need to pray as Jesus prayed? Does Jesus' example in the area of indepth, lengthy prayer have meaning for us today?:

7. This week's focus on care and prayer...

There are many important points that we can discuss about the prayer life of Jesus, but the fact remains that the most significant aspect of His prayer life is that He actually did pray and with great earnestness and energy.

If He needed to pray in this way, are we not even more in need? If He, being God, needed to pray, how much more we mere humans? Take a few moments to thank God for the model of Jesus prayers, and ask the Lord to show you how you might appropriate overcoming power in the degree that Jesus did.

Lesson 20 Living With Evil Without Becoming Evil

KEY VERSE: “Do not fret because of evil men or be envious of those who do wrong; for like the grass they will wither, like green plants they will soon die away.” Psalm 37: 1

1. In the ‘60’s there was a train robbery in Great Britain in which an enormous amount of money was taken. Many of the thieves were captured, but one made his escape with a great deal of the loot to South America – or so the story goes. Assuming for a moment that he made his escape, on what do you think he spent his money?:

- Do you think he enjoyed himself?
- Would you want to have his money? Why or why not?

2. A number of so called “white collar thieves” perpetrate crimes on an unsuspecting public and seem to get away with their misdeeds. One recent investment scandal in the east took a large number of unsuspecting Christians for a great deal of money. The “thieves” have not been charged with a crime. Do you think these thieves really get away with their crimes or do they pay? If they do “pay,” in what way?

3. According to the following passages, what are some of the things that will actually happen to the individuals that seem to succeed in their evil deeds? Psalm 37: 1- 11

Psalm 1: 3- 6

Psalm 73: 12,18- 20

4. In the Psalm 37 passage, what are some of the temptations people experience in the face of the wicked seeming to get away with evil? In other words, what are some of the erroneous attitudes and actions faithful people might do in the face of evil doers?

5. Again reading from the Psalm 37 passage (seen at right), what kinds of positive practices on the part of the righteous prevent the “upset” spirit, attitudes and activities that accumulate so naturally when evil people are in view?

6. What is God’s attitude toward those that do evil? Does he hate them with an everlasting anger, or is he very concerned about their fate wanting very much to rescue them without compromising His holiness?:

7. What would happen to the wicked if their eternal fate were left up to people like us?:

8. This week's focus on care and prayer...

Everyone has a concern about evil, a particular concern that sets them off into anger and resentment. The Bible says that we should visit that anger place only briefly (“ don't let the sun go down on it”) and that we should turn that energy into something more constructive – like perusing righteousness and being a light and an example. The Lord can then use us to deal with evil in His special way.

Perhaps there is a situation close to you in which evil is being practiced – even on you! Have you given the Lord a chance to deal with that evil one by your sincere concern for their spiritual condition?

Let the Lord lead you as you pray...

Lesson 21 The Meaning Of Pain

KEY VERSE: “But the meek will inherit the land and enjoy great peace.”
Psalm 37: 11

1. Here is a provocative statement on pain. After you have read it, tell us if you think it is true and, if so, one reason it might be so: “Disasters are inevitable in life, and with disaster comes pain, the personal side of experiencing a disaster. Most of us don’t deal well with pain. Rather than process the pain, deal with it now, we tend to postpone or delay the pain. The attraction to immediate gratification drives people away from pain...”
Timmons & Arterburn

2. What are some of the things that cause pain and what are some of the things people do to postpone that pain? (Share some examples):

3. Read Genesis 3: 16- 19 Describe the circumstances under which pain first made its appearance into this world:

4. Read Romans 8: 20- 23. Is pain really something that is inevitable for us all?:

5. Read I Corinthians 4: 9- 14. When individuals are “spiritual” and mature, and really know how to have victory in prayer (as the apostle Paul surely demonstrated), are they assured less pain than those who are less mature?:

6. In the Bible there are many references to the relationship between pain, suffering and deprivation on the one hand, and blessings and rewards on the other. In the following passages, see if the “pain” can be identified and also the reward: **PASSAGE THE “PAIN” THE CERTAIN REWARD**

a. II Timothy 2: 8- 12

b. Hebrews 10: 34

c. Romans 8: 17

d. Matthew 5: 11

7. Read Psalm 37: 11 and Matthew 5: 5. The word “meek” in the Hebrew language means “to experience pain with the idea of becoming more mature,” in this case, becoming more dependent on God. In the Greek

Language (the language in which the New Testament was written) it means “power or strength that has been brought under control or under direction of a leader or master,” in this case by the Master Himself.

What is the method by which the meek “inherit the land and the earth” as indicated in this passage? In personal terms, what does God promise to do for YOU if you take on the goal of meekness in the face of His program for you to obtain it.

7. This week’s focus on care and prayer...

Is there a “pain” in your life right now that you are running away from? Is the Spirit of God trying to make it work for you – or is the evil one trying to discourage and humiliate you with it?

It is not easy to share a real hurt that is difficult even for you to share.

Lesson 22 A Ready Heart For Worship

KEY VERSE: “I call on the Lord in my distress and he answers me.”

Psalm 120: 1

1. You're a senior in High School (what, again? – once was enough!) and you are just about to go out on a very important date with someone very special, someone you admire and respect. What are some of the things you would do to prepare for the occasion?

- If there was something negative going on between you and your date, in your opinion, would it be better to take care of the matter before you went out to the special event, during the event, or after the event?:

2. You are on your way to the worship service of the church home you have adopted. It's a 15 minute drive and just as you begin your trip, the man on the radio station to which you were listening says something odd: “Are you ready to worship God when you arrive at church this morning?” Your initial answer: “I don't know.” How would you prepare yourself for worship during the next 14 minutes?:

3. Read Micah 6: 6- 8. When the Hebrews came to the Lord to worship, there were things that the Lord requested, but there were some things that were even more important that He required...

REQUESTED

REQUIRED

4. Reviewing the passage in the previous question, what things do you think the Lord requests and requires in the church today?:

REQUESTED

REQUIRED

5. There are a number of things that are part of the worship of God that He has told us about through His servants. In the passages below, identify the act of worship, and speculate as to its purpose:

PASSAGE	The Practice	The Purpose
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a. Psalm 95: 1- 7

b. Romans 12: 1,2

c. Psalm 40: 6- 10

d. Psalm 51: 15- 17

6. This week's focus on care and prayer...

The worship of the Lord is one of the most frequently discussed topics in the Bible. Preparation for worship is right up there with worship itself. In fact, we would be hard pressed to distinguish between the two in actual practice. In your prayer and share time, take a few moments and talk about some of the things you do to prepare for worship, and then – exchanging ideas and suggestions, and if you have the freedom to do so – prepare yourself for worship with your partners...

Lesson 23 Being There For And With God's Team Members

KEY VERSE: "I rejoiced with those who said to me, 'Let us go to the house of the LORD. '" Psalm 122: 1

1. "Team sports." Just about everyone on planet earth has played team sports at some time or another, whether it be bridge or tackle football. Describe some of the consequences when (in a sport you can chose as an example) one or two of the members of your team decide to be a spectator instead of a genuine participant in the game? Will this effect the outcome of the game?

- Focus for a moment on what happens to the spirit and the attitude of the other members of the team?

2. Read Psalm 122: 1- 3. What kind of attitude does David (the author) describe as his when he considers spending some time in worship with his friends and fellow believers? Try to put this idea in present day language and discuss how this emotion might express itself in everyday conduct:

3. Read the following passages and describe the attitudes and corresponding actions related to the house of God as seen in these passages. (We need to realize that these are all experiences that would normally be shared with other believers, times of praise, rejoicing, thanksgiving and worship in its various forms.):

PASSAGE	Any Attitudes Revealed	Any Action Initiated
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a. I Chronicles 29: 3

b. Psalm 26: 8

c. Isaiah 37: 1

d. Psalm 27: 4

e. Micah 4: 2

f. Psalm 84: 10

4. When you worship God together with believers, what are some of the most meaningful things to you personally?; what activity enables you to most freely give expression to your “team worship”?

5. Read Hebrews 10: 19- 25. The author of Hebrews gives instruction about effective and enduring worship of God. Notice that the context is one of worship on the model of the Old Testament Temple...

What does he say about the role of a clear conscience?

What does he say about our general attitude?

What does he say about the role of joining with others in worship?

6. This week's focus on care and prayer...

Worship was designed to be not only a personal activity, but to be a group activity. In fact, there are things that God will do through groups worshipping together that he will not do any other way. The power of the group sing, the incredible joy sharing an answer to prayer, the testimony of god's hand at work in our midst shared with many people.

The mere thought of getting together with others to worship can be that which sparks a special joy in our hearts: "I rejoiced with those who said to me, 'Let us go to the house of the LORD.'" Psalm 122: 1.

With your prayer partner(s), give some time of worship, praise and thanks to God. Experience that Joy together...

Lesson 24 In The Service Of The Lord

KEY VERSE: “As the eyes of slaves look to the hand of their master.. so our eyes look to the LORD our God...” Psalm 123: 2

1. It is one of the nicest restaurants in town. You’ve just spent the evening with some dear friends that you have not seen in some time. The dinner is over and you are about to depart. It’s time to leave a tip so you take a moment and ask those at the table, “What did you think of the service at our table?” “Terrific!” ...” Best I can remember!”.. are the unanimous responses. Describe some of the characteristics of service that might deserve those kinds of comments:

- When you look back on the service you receive at a church “service” who are the “servers”? In what ways does their service compare with the service given in your favorite restaurant?

2. During Biblical times, in the New Testament era especially, estimates are given that approximately two thirds of the population were slaves. The general population was very familiar with the role of a servant and the meaning of good service. In the New Testament there are numerous passages that describe the quality of a servant’s service. Some of these are listed below.

As you read these passages, note in column one the conduct befitting a faithful servant to men, and in column two, indicate how a servant/Christian might express this quality in a worship service to God:

PASSAGE What the Word says about the conduct of a faithful servant

How it might be expressed in a worship service a.

Ephesians 6: 5

b. Colossians 3: 22

c. I Timothy 6: 1

d. Titus 2: 9

e. I Peter 2: 18

f. Psalm 84: 10

3. Read Psalm 123. In verses 3 and 4 there is a description of the kind of treatment servants sometimes get while carrying out the assignments of their master. Imagine for a moment (the write down) the kinds of things that might have happened to this worship service servant in this Psalm that could have prompted him to utter his prayer to God:

- How does this treatment compare with the typical treatment given to the average waiter or waitress in a local restaurant?

4. Based on what we have studied thus far, would you say one should expect some measure of difficulty to be encountered when conducting a service of worship?

- Read Romans 12: 1,2 (.. the NASB has it “spiritual service of worship” at the end of verse 1). What does it take to do an effective worship according to this passage?

6. This week’s focus on care and prayer...

In a worship service, we are the servants and God is the master. Our fellow Christians and those that do not know Christ are the ones that receive our service. In fact, the words “minister, “deacon” and “service” all come from the same basic origin (of meaning) so that all the people in the body of Christ are actually united as fellow servants.

Serving takes time and effort. And serving is best accomplished when it is done at the loving direction of a loving master. Because the Christian has the latter, the former becomes much easier.

How is your service – especially your worship service – doing? Share with your prayer partner about your service as the Lord leads...

Lesson 25 Dialing “911” For The Lord

KEY VERSE: “... if the LORD had not been on our side when men attacked us, when their anger flared against us, they would have swallowed us alive.” Psalm 124: 2,3

1. In almost every city in America there is some sort of rescue squad to help deal with an emergency involving people. In most major cities anyone can pick up the phone and dial “911” and get a host of services. Give some examples of the types of situations that would require such services:

- What are some of the situations which might qualify as a real emergency but for which “911” could offer no real help? Are there some difficult, emergency situations in which medical or police training is of little help?

- Who and how do we call in the case of a spiritual emergency?

2. In the following situations described in the Bible, the writer tells about a predicament and then describes the Lord’s help. In most every case, there is also listed a second and sometimes unexpected result of that help. List those helps and their results in the spaces provided below:

PASSAGE	Help The Lord Offers Results Of The Lord’s Help
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a. James 1: 5

b. II Corinthians 1: 3,4

c. John 16: 33

d. I Peter 4: 12,13

e. Psalm 23: 4

f. Psalm 37: 16- 19

g. Luke 12: 28

3. Read Acts 27: 14- 26, 42- 44. In this story of Paul's shipwreck during a storm on the way to Rome, we encounter several truths about God's care of His people and how He can care for people not yet in His family:

- Does man have control over the weather and the ocean currents? Where does one go when dealing with such forces?; where do we make our appeal?;

- What kind of protection did the Lord provide for His children in this situation? Physical? Mental? Emotional?

4. Read Philippians 4: 4- 7. As implied by this passage, what are some of the typical aggravations that might bring a person to find no satisfaction with earthly “911” and speak with God instead?

- What kind of practical results can we expect in calling Him?

5. This week’s focus on care and prayer...

Most emergencies can be most effectively dealt with if we have done the basic preparation (having a medical kit for example) and having the proper mental attitude (which means, basically, expecting them to arrive – they are inevitable!).

But many, if not most of life’s emergencies will find little help from “911”. The Lord has a vast array of people, power and tools at His disposal to help deal with things like major depression, unexpected feelings of hostility, deep fears, impending death, etc. In each case, the Lord has some very important and unexpected blessings in store for the “emergency victim”.

A piece of paper was left in the church sanctuary recently that made its way to the church office. On it was written: “Pain is inevitable; misery is optional.” With your prayer partner – if you have the freedom to do so, share an area of “pain” and dial “911” – to God – together.

Lesson 26 The Meaning Of Godly Courage

KEY VERSE: “Those who trust in the LORD are like Mount Zion, which cannot be shaken but endures forever.” Psalm 125: 1

courage, n. 1. the quality of mind or spirit that enables one to face difficulty, danger, pain etc., with firmness and without fear; bravery. Also, to act in accordance with one’s belief’s, especially in spite of criticism.

1. There are various everyday situations in our society that call for the use of courage. Take a few minutes to identify some of these:

- There are also some extraordinary situations that require courage –ones which are rare; they don’t happen every day, and sometimes not in a month or a year, but they come along. Identify some of these:

2. In thinking about some of these instances that take courage, where would one expect to obtain this important quality if one did not have it or lacked enough of it to deal with a particular situation?

3. Read II Chronicles 32: 7. The Bible records many instances where people are asked to “take courage” or “be courageous” or “act with bravery.” Obviously the source has something to do with God. But how do you suppose the follower of God is to get this thing called bravery?

4. There are many instances in the Bible where one or more of God's people are told to "take courage" in the midst of some challenge, difficulty or obstacle in the path. In the following passages, see if you can identify what it is that will take courage, and from where or how we are to "take courage":

PASSAGE | Situation Requiring Courage | Its Source &/ or Basis

a. Deuter. 31: 6

b. Joshua 1: 6

c. Joshua 10: 25

d. I Chronicles 19: 13

e. I Chronicles 22: 13

f. II Chronicles 32: 7

g. Philippians 1: 27- 30

4. Someone has defined godly courage as "confronting an opponent with the confidence that we will ultimately succeed." In light of the passages we have examined in this study, how might we come to have this confidence referred to in this definition?

5. Most of the passages in the Bible referring to courage mention either the presence or the promises of the Lord or both. What would happen to Christian courage in the following situations if either of these were absent?:

Facing personal death...

Telling others about Jesus within a pagan culture...

6. This week's focus on care and prayer...

Bravery is a very special quality that every person has to some degree (after all, every human has been fashioned in the image of God), but having enough of it and using it wisely are the critical issues. If a person fails to use it properly, bravery becomes mere foolhardiness. If a person is in short supply, timidity and cowardice are the result.

The presence of Christ provides the perfect direction and guidance that bravery needs. The power of Christ provides the necessary energy and endurance to keep bravery in the picture throughout.

If you feel free to do so, see if you and your prayer partners can identify an area in which bravery is needed and ask the Lord for His presence and power to face and deal with it.

God be with you as you share...

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